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Monster sandstorm barrels into Kuwait, grounds flights

Visibility falls to almost zero • Amir Cup final delayed • Scores hospitalized in Iraq



KUWAIT: (Left) An aerial view of a massive dust storm advancing into Kuwait above the Kuwait University campus in Shadadiya on May 23, 2022. (Right) Pedestrians cross a road amidst the severe sandstorm. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat (More pics on Page 2)

KUWAIT: A massive dust storm rolled into Kuwait on Monday, reducing visibility to almost zero across the country, as flights were suspended for a second time this month. Commercial flights will be rescheduled because of current weather patterns, while air traffic will only resume normally once the dust storm subsides, said Emad Al-Juluwi, Kuwait Civil Aviation's Deputy Director General for Air Navigation Services Affairs.

The interior ministry cautioned all citizens and expatriates over the unstable weather conditions, advising the public to contact the emergency hotline 112 for any assistance on the roads. It called on seagoers to contact the coastguard operations on 1880888 if necessary.

The meteorological department had warned the sandstorm will hit the country with active northwesterly wind with

speeds of 60 km/h. Yasser Al-Boloushi, an official at the meteorological department, told KUNA that the dust storm may lead to low visibility in some areas and will continue until Tuesday evening. He urged the public to check the weather forecast on their official website www.met.gov.kw and through their smartphone app KuwaitMet.

The Amiri Diwan said in a statement that due to the weather conditions and

out of keenness on safety of the players and spectators, it was decided to delay Monday's final match of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Football Cup between Kazma and Salmiya at Jaber Stadium until Tuesday. The Ministry of Health announced suspending work Monday at the Kuwait Vaccination Center as well as the Jaber Causeway and Jleeb vaccination centers due to the bad weather conditions.

In neighboring Iraq, public buildings were closed and airports were temporarily shut Monday as another sandstorm - the ninth since mid-April - hit the country. More than 1,000 people were hospitalized across the nation with respiratory problems, health ministry spokesman Seif Al-Badr told AFP, as the region grapples with the increasingly frequent weather phenomenon.

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News in brief

Libyan wins top Arabic fiction prize

ABU DHABI: Libyan author Mohamed Alnaas became the youngest winner of the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction with his debut novel "Bread on Uncle Milad's Table" on Sunday. Alnaas, 31, will receive \$50,000 and funds will also be provided to translate his book into English. The winning novel explores gender roles in the male-dominated closed society of a Libyan village. — AFP (See Page 13)

Under-5 jab effective with 3 doses

WASHINGTON: The Pfizer/BioNTech Covid vaccine is safe and effective for children aged six months to under five years when given in three doses, the companies said in a statement Monday. Pfizer/BioNTech evaluated three doses, given at three micrograms, in a clinical trial and found the vaccine evoked a strong immune response. Vaccine efficacy was 80.3 percent. Side effects were similar in the vaccine and placebo groups. — AFP

Paris Qatar embassy guard killed

PARIS: A security guard working for the Qatari embassy in Paris was killed Monday after a fight with another man in front of the mission, French prosecutors said. The fight took place just before 07:00 am local time in front of the embassy in the 8th district in central Paris. The man involved in the fight has been arrested. — AFP

Experts call to allow expats to buy properties

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Foreign investments in Kuwait remain weak, despite the establishment of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, whose main role is to provide investors with

the best environment and facilities. Preventing foreigners from buying properties is one of the main reasons for the dearth in local investment.

Some real estate experts told Kuwait Times that Kuwait's policy and laws are the reason foreigners are not allowed to own real estate in the country, saying they don't see any logical reason for this ban. According to the World Bank, total remittances by workers in Kuwait during the first nine months of 2021 amounted to KD 4.12 billion, a steady increase of 8.5 percent, with remittances during the same period in 2020 estimated at KD 3.8 billion. (See Page 4)



KUWAIT: Buildings are seen around Kuwait City in this illustrative file photo.

Oman, Iran sign deals; Raisi warns to 'avenge' killing

MUSCAT: Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi arrived in Oman on Monday as the two countries signed a string of trade deals and as international talks on Tehran's nuclear program hang in the balance, leaving the Islamic republic under sanctions. Raisi, on his second Gulf visit since taking office in August, was greeted by Sultan Haitham bin Tariq at the airport and received a 21-gun salute at the royal palace, an Omani statement said.

Raisi's one-day trip comes at a time when renewed talks on restoring a 2015 nuclear deal are at a stalemate. Oman played a mediating role between Tehran and Washington in the build-up to the original agreement.

Continued on Page 6



TEHRAN: Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq welcomes Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi upon arrival to the Omani capital on May 23, 2022. — AFP

More than 100m people forcibly displaced: UN

GENEVA: Russia's war in Ukraine has pushed the number of forcibly displaced people around the world above 100 million for the first time ever, the United Nations said Monday. "The number of people forced to flee conflict, violence, human rights violations and persecution has now crossed the staggering milestone of 100 million for the first time on record, propelled by the war in Ukraine and other deadly conflicts," said UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency.

The "alarming" figure must shake the world into ending the conflicts forcing record numbers to flee their own homes, the UNHCR said in a statement. UNHCR said the numbers of forcibly displaced people rose towards 90 million by the end

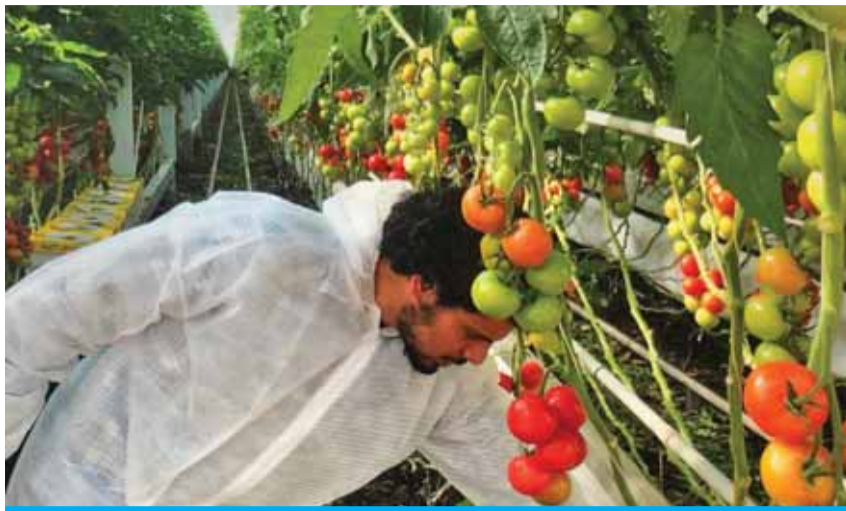
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Dust storm blankets Kuwait, halts flights and traffic



Local



KUWAIT: Manager of the Organic Agriculture Department at the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources Abdulrahman Al-Fraih.



Abdulrahman Al-Fraih and colleagues at a greenhouse site.



Abdulrahman Al-Fraih and his colleagues.

Farming expert sees future in organic agriculture in Kuwait

Kuwait looks at greening to help improve environment

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Trees reduce air temperature and the intensity of greenhouse heat by lowering carbon dioxide levels. Greening is not merely an act of beautification, but also a basic need for the environment and population of Kuwait. Kuwait Times spoke with Abdulrahman Al-Fraih, Manager of the Organic Agriculture Department at the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources to learn more. Fraih is an expert in researching production of organic vegetables to develop new methods for the future of farms in the country.

Kuwait Times: How can your research help to evolve agriculture in Kuwait?

Abdulrahman Al-Fraih: I have recently just begun researching farming techniques in Kuwait. I hope I can provide some options in the future for farmers to grow more sustainably and hopefully incorporate more organic techniques. Previously, I was working on a project collecting and sorting native Kuwaiti seeds.

KT: You have visited several farms around the world for research purposes. What have you learned that will help in developing the industry in Kuwait?

Fraih: There was a farm in Japan that employed people with disabilities and the ones who did not get the opportunity to work got exposed to nature instead of being in a facility. They can go out and do something that is also

benefiting them, because they can use their skills. I would love to set up an initiative to help people get out of the house and work with vegetables and involve disabled people more in the society. My future initiative will be well-studied and try to find a facility close to the city, because people will not drive for an hour to farms in Abdaly.



A lot of people in Kuwait like to reinvent

Another organic Dutch greenhouse produces energy and supplies it to the city. They have large generators to create energy for the greenhouse. Any additional energy they send it to the city. We should work on ways to make farms more sustainable. I have a farm in Abdaly, where I use solar panels to control the water pumping system. I want to try to use robots to help with various production tasks and collect as much water as I can. Some farms collect condensation to harvest water.

So far we do not have a problem with energy, but

when the prices of energy and water increase, we have to think outside the box. The farm is not only a way to produce, but we also can make it as a means of income.

KT: Do you see a future in organic agriculture in the country?

Fraih: I do see a future in organic agriculture. It may be small at the start, but there is a market for organic products.

KT: How do you hope your research will change agriculture in Kuwait?

Fraih: Since agriculture can be a slow process, seeing my research adopted by farmers will take time, especially as the positives take time to show. However, the journey of agriculture is sometimes a patient one, since plants take a long time to grow. But one can hope some of the ideas can be used to make better-educated decisions, so farmers can choose the best options.

Most projects take time before adoption in Kuwait despite being beneficial to the farmer and the environment because they do not trust them yet. For example, hydroponics is the cultivation of plants without using soil. The system is not new - it has been around since the '70s. People know the system is more efficient, uses less water and has more benefits, so why has it not been adopted, although it has been researched extensively?

Farming in Kuwait is a hobby to get money from production, but the income only covers their losses most of

the time. Farmers are only focusing on the support they get from the government. How soon my idea will be adopted will depend on the farmer. I work with my team on research on agroforestry, which is a technique to utilize the different aspects of trees and plants (combining trees and shrubs with crop and livestock farming systems). The study will take years to be implemented to set the future of farming in Kuwait - it is more about giving people options.

The weirdest thing in Kuwait is that a lot of people like to reinvent. There is a lot of research on how the greenhouse is set up. It has been used since the '60s, but people in Kuwait tend to do it their way without any proper methodology. So they end up with a unique greenhouse that is much worse than how we are supposed to use it.

Greenhouses use a cooling pad system to bring down the temperature. The whole idea is to get cooler temperature for the plants depending on the thickness of the cardboard and how the air goes through it to cool it. But here they use palm leaves instead of cardboard and salt-water, which doesn't serve the purpose.

KT: How does planting help in limiting climate change in Kuwait?

Fraih: Planting trees can play a small role in climate change, since they are capable of sequestering carbon or reusing waste and producing compost that can be used to increase the productivity of plants and reduce landfills.



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al-Sabah meets Tunisian Prime Minister Dr Najla Bouden. — KUNA

Kuwait PM representative meets with Tunisian PM

KUWAIT: His highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah's representative, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al-Sabah met on Monday with the Tunisian Prime Minister Dr Najla Bouden. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum held in Davos, in which both sides discussed ways of enhancing bilateral ties on all levels. — KUNA

Arab League, EU stresses importance of banning illegal arms, small weapons

CAIRO: The Arab League and the European Union stressed on Monday the importance of combating illegal trade and spread of light arms and small weapons in the Arab countries. This came in a speech delivered by Deputy Assistance for Arabic Affairs and National Security Sector at the Arab League Ambassador Khalil Al-Thawwadi during the international conference on combating the trafficking and proliferation of small arms. Thawwadi said that the conference represents a new era of cooperation between the two organization in the fields of disarmaments and prevention, hoping the outcomes will be "fruitful and affective". The conference will enhance efforts by the two institutions to implement

the UN work program related to combatting these weapons at the national, regional and international levels, he noted. He stressed that the small arms have become one of the main causes of destabilization, increased regional tensions, and expansion of terrorist and criminal networks and conflicts that are destroying local communities and contributing to prolonging conflicts. He referred to some Arab countries witnessing internal conflicts in the past few years that resulted in increasing the use of illegal small arms and light weapons, and prolonged conflicts that extended not only for neighboring countries but also for the international community. He stressed that the Arab League is fully aware of the dangers of the illegal trade in arms and its political, economic, social and humanitarian effects on individuals and societies. Ambassador Thawwadi called for limiting the trade in these weapons between governments, stressing the importance of international assistance and cooperation to support national efforts to track and detect smuggled weapons.

European Union Ambassador to Egypt Christian Burger said that the spread of small arms and light weapons ease the criminal violence in the Arabic countries, leading to casualties and deaths. In his speech, Ambassador Burger said that this issue is a priority to the EU, which has allocated EURO six million to finance the second phase of the cooperation project between the Arab League and the Union "within the framework of the strategic dialogue between the two organizations launched in 2019. Kuwait is participating in the conference with a delegation headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Talal Al-Mutairi from Weapons Investigation Department at the Ministry of Interior, and Membership of Lieutenant-Colonel Abdul Aziz Al-Mailil from General Department of Weapons Investigations at the Ministry. The conference will also discuss issues of international transfer of small and light weapons, border control, prevention of arms flows, identification and disruption of sources of small arms, capacity building of law enforcement agencies, among others. — KUNA



CAIRO: The Kuwaiti delegation participating at the conference. — KUNA

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News in brief

Kuwait Deputy
Amir receives
Interior Minister

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Monday, at Bayan Palace, First Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

No monkeypox
cases detected
in Kuwait: MoH

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health confirmed no monkeypox cases were detected in the country. The ministry's twitter account noted that the ministry is closely following latest developments of the virus worldwide, with precautionary measures at hand. The World Health Organization had announced that, until last night, 92 cases have been confirmed globally.

Unified Arab
efforts to promote
economic integration

CAIRO: Kuwaiti MP Abdullah Al-Turiji called for unifying efforts to boost economic integration among Arab countries. On the sidelines of his participation at the Arab forum on boosting economic integration, Turiji said that the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war had repercussions on food security and the economies of some Arab countries. He stressed the importance of facing these consequences and to enhance joint economic cooperation among Arab countries on economic various fields.



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George met Mishaal Ibrahim Al-Modhaf, Assistant Foreign Minister for Consulate Affairs on Monday and discussed, inter-alia, ongoing recruitment of Indian workers, implementation of MoU on domestic workers, police verification certificates, family visas and other diaspora matters.

Ooredoo Kuwait
Gold Sponsor of
AUM career fair

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, participated as the Gold Sponsor at the American University of the Middle East's Career Fair. Ooredoo's Human Resources Department was present at the career fair to answer students' queries about job opportunities, job descriptions, career paths, and to learn about the different training and internship opportunities Ooredoo provides annually in collaboration with different entities.

Omar Saleh Al-Bassam, Chief Human Resources and Administration Services Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait reiterated the company's belief in the major role youth play in the future of the country. Ooredoo's support for youth is deep-rooted within its

Experts say Kuwait ban on expats buying
property hinders efforts to lure investors

'Opening investment for expats can increase spending inside Kuwait'

By Majd Othman

KUWAIT: Foreign investments in Kuwait remain weak, despite the establishment of the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, whose main role is to provide investors with the best environment and facilities. Preventing foreigners from buying properties is one of the main reasons for the dearth in local investment. Some real estate experts told Kuwait Times that Kuwait's policy and laws are the reason foreigners are not allowed to own real estate in the country, saying they don't see any logical reason for this ban.

"There is no reason to prevent expats from buying their own properties in Kuwait. According to government policies and from my point of view, the state can limit ownership of properties by expats or foreign investors to specific areas. They should allow it based on the government's desire to develop the economy," International real estate advisor Meshaal Al-Melhem told Kuwait Times.

"Kuwait has more than 3.5 million expats, who constantly transfer their money to their countries," Melhem said, adding "opening the door for expats' investment in properties will boost the rate of spending inside Kuwait, and will create new competitive opportunities that will also contribute to an increase in supply and demand, which will also benefit Kuwaiti investors."

According to the World Bank, total remittances by workers in Kuwait during the first nine months of 2021 amounted to KD 4.12 billion, a steady increase of 8.5 percent, with remittances during the same period in 2020 estimated at KD 3.8 billion.

Safe environment

Regarding real estate prices in Kuwait, Melhem explained that "if we compare the prices of properties according to the income of expats, they can be considered high, but Kuwait is a developed country that provides a safe environment and financial stability and does not impose any taxes, so real estate prices can be considered reasonable."

"If we compare Kuwait with the UAE and Britain and some other developed countries that are experiencing economic development and high demand for jobs, usually they have high property prices," he said. "Some amendments related to the real estate industry in Kuwait can be made to reduce the prices of real estate by offering a very large range of opportunities to create a balance in the value of properties and expats' incomes," Melhem added.

Secretary of the Real Estate Federation Qais Al-Ghanem recalled the Union of Real Estate in Kuwait had "demanded to allow expats to own apartments during the 1990s, especially since the Municipality and ministry of justice at that time



Meshaal Al-Melhem

Qais Al-Ghanem

also submitted similar proposals". "For no logical reason, we found the government was not interested in our proposal. We were aiming to find new investment tools in the Kuwaiti market to boost investment, which will benefit both Kuwaitis and expatriates," Ghanem said.

"It was not a priority for the government to pass the law, as well as its fear of a clash with members of the National Assembly, as Kuwaiti citizens reject such a law," he explained. "The real estate sector in Kuwait is ready and hungry for new buyers, especially with falling rentals of apartments as a result of large numbers of expats leaving the country and vacating their flats," Ghanem stressed.

Ghanem also spoke about the importance of banks' role in developing the real estate investment sector. He said real estate is one of the most important investment tools in Kuwait, pointing out that deposits in local banks have exceeded KD 30 billion.

Steady
increase
in total
remittancesGulf Bank promotes
female leadership
in diplomatic corps

KUWAIT: In honor of Kuwaiti Women's Day, Gulf Bank announced its sponsorship of a panel discussion organized by the Soroptimist Kuwait association for community development. The panel discussed female leaders in the diplomatic corps as part of its support for local civil society efforts that empower women.

The event was attended by a large group of newly appointed women in the Kuwaiti diplomatic corps and included other female ambassadors of Arab and foreign countries working in Kuwait.

The participating ambassadors shared their personal experiences in the diplomatic field, and discussed what it is like to work in the diplomatic corps. The attendees also discussed the challenges of the workplace, as well as their strategies as to how they overcame them.

They also provided new ambassadors with tips and best practices for the work environment.

The speakers also praised Kuwait's significant developments in the female empowerment sphere, especially in light of the fact that Kuwait has the largest proportion of women working in the diplomatic corps in the Middle East.

During the event, the ambassadors pointed out that Kuwait has come a long way in empowering women, in terms of both political rights and their participation in the development of the national economy through employment across various sec-

tors. These recent efforts are part of a long line of achievements accomplished by the state and the private sector in supporting and empowering women.

"Today, we are pleased to celebrate the women of Kuwait, who hold incredible roles in such a vital field. We are proud to honor these women as part of Gulf Bank's firm belief in empowering women and youth across various fields, through the effective application of the principles of sustainability," commented the Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Lujain Al-Qenaei.

She added: "We believe in the vital and strategic role played by women and youth in various sectors in Kuwait, and I am pleased to highlight our pride in all the women working in the diplomatic service in Kuwait. We hope that today's gathering and panel discussion will serve as a motivation for young women attending this event to pursue the careers of their dreams with confidence and conviction."

Al-Qenaei also touched on Gulf Bank's continuous efforts in empowering women, noting that Gulf Bank is the first bank in Kuwait to eliminate all cases of gender-based discrimination between its employees and achieve full equality between them in job benefits. This notable achievement comes in accordance with the United Nations' principles on women's empowerment, and in implementation of the Bank's 2025 strategy, knowing that one of its pillars is to achieve community sustainability within and outside the Bank.

She also affirmed the Bank's commitment to empower women through employment and in supporting their career pathways to leadership positions. It is worth noting that the percentage of female employees at Gulf Bank recently exceeded 40 percent of the Bank's total staff, while their share of



leadership positions exceeded 30 percent in 2020.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.





Seven killed after fire engulfs Philippine ferry

Sole survivor relives 2009 Yemenia Airways crash

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DAVOS: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is seen on a giant screen next to Founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum Klaus Schwab during his address by video conference as part of the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on May 23, 2022. —AFP

Send us weapons, stop Russia trade: Zelensky

87 killed in a May 17 Russian strike on a military base

DAVOS, Switzerland: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky used the Davos summit Monday to appeal for more weapons and "maximum" sanctions against Russia, lamenting that tens of thousands of lives would have been saved had countries acted faster. Appearing by video link, Zelensky delivered the headline speech to the first World Economic Forum to be held in the Swiss Alps in more than two years after the COVID pandemic derailed the event.

The conflict shows "that support to the country under attack is more valuable the sooner it is provided: weapons, funding, political support and sanctions against Russia," said Zelensky, who received a standing ovation. "If we would have received them by 100 percent of ours needs at once back in February, the result would have been tens of thousands of lives saved," said Zelensky, flanked by Ukrainian flags and wearing an olive-green T-shirt.

"This is why Ukraine needs all the weapons that we ask for, not just the ones that have been provided," he said, adding that 87 people were killed in a May 17 Russian strike on a military base in northern Ukraine.

Anastasia Radina, a Ukrainian lawmaker, told AFP that her country needs "NATO-style" weapons

including tanks and ground-based air defence systems. "What we are looking for most importantly are fighter jets and this has been the most difficult discussion," she said.

"Three months into the war, and tens of thousands lives lost, we are still at the point of discussing if we need fighter jets. Frankly speaking this is outrageous." Ukraine is receiving howitzers "but that is not yet enough," she said.

End all Russia trade

Zelensky called for an oil embargo on Russia, punitive measures against all its banks and the shunning of its IT sector, adding that all foreign companies should leave the country. "There should not be any trade with Russia," he told the gathering.

"I believe there are still no such sanctions against Russia-and there should be." While the United States, Britain and Canada have moved to ban Russian oil and gas, the European Union has been divided over imposing similar measures. EU members such as Germany and Hungary are heavily dependent on energy supplies from Russia.

WEF Klaus Schwab praised Zelensky for his "courageous leadership" and said Davos participants

were eager to hear how they could assist Ukraine "because everybody is affected by what's happening in your country."

The war is dominating the four-day meeting of the world's business and political elites, with Ukraine sending a strong contingent of officials, including the foreign minister, to plead for more aid. Russian business and political leaders, who used to participate in debates and mingle with other A-listers at champagne parties, were barred by organisers from attending this year's gathering over the war.

The Ukrainians have transformed the "Russia House" in Davos—normally used by the Russian delegation—into the "Russia War Crimes House" to promote their cause. More than 50 heads of state or government are among the 2,500 delegates at the WEF under the title "History at a Turning Point".

Some of the biggest names include Germany's new chancellor, Olaf Scholz, European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen, NATO head Jens Stoltenberg and US climate envoy John Kerry.

'Bonanza' for billionaires

When the WEF last took place in Davos in January 2020, the coronavirus was just brewing in

China before morphing into a devastating pandemic. A Davos forum took place virtually last year, with Russian President Vladimir Putin among the speakers. While the summit is back, it lacks its usual snowy backdrop after the Omicron variant forced this year's January meeting to be postponed until now. Instead, rain is forecast all week.

Climate change and concerns about the economic recovery from the pandemic are also at the forefront of the Davos talks. Inflation has become a major concern as energy and food prices have soared further since Russia invaded Ukraine, raising fears of hunger in countries dependent on wheat from the region.

Global charity Oxfam warned that 263 million people could sink into extreme poverty this year, at a rate of one million every 33 hours. By contrast, 573 new billionaires have emerged during the pandemic, or one every 30 hours.

"Billionaires are arriving in Davos to celebrate an incredible surge in their fortunes," Oxfam executive director Gabriela Bucher said in a statement. The pandemic and now the steep increases in food and energy prices have, simply put, been a bonanza for them," Bucher said. —AFP

Getting away with murder in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: When social media star Qandeel Baloch was strangled by her brother for unapologetically challenging Pakistan's attitudes towards women, activists fought for her murder to trigger a new era of justice over so-called "honour" killings. Her killer's release in February, less than three years into a life sentence, has instead underlined how the country's legal system still allows for men to abuse, rape and murder women with impunity.

In Pakistan, overlapping legal systems riddled with loopholes and a deeply patriarchal society combine to ensure women survivors of violence are unlikely to get justice, activists, lawyers and survivors told AFP. "The whole process from the moment a crime is committed against a woman to registering it with the police—and then the court procedure—is structured in such a way that justice remains elusive," said Nayab Gohar Jan, a

prominent rights activist.

"Add to that societal pressures and stigmas, and you can see the odds are clearly stacked against them." Much of Pakistani society operates under an "honour" code where women can be killed for bringing "shame" on their families by acts such as interacting with men or marrying someone they choose themselves.

More than 470 cases of "honour" killings were reported to police in 2021, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), though many cases go unreported by families who collude with the killers—often male relatives. Pakistan ranked 153 out of 156 countries on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap index in 2021, which noted stark disparities in access to justice, education and employment.

Biased courts

Baloch both captivated and scandalised Pakistan with her short skirts and provocative dancing on Facebook. Her murder in 2016 was arguably Pakistan's most high-profile case of an "honour" killing. Days after killing her, Muhammad Waseem defiantly told journalists that he strangled his sister because of her "intolerable" behaviour.

and military power. Washington and allies like Japan have framed their tough response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a warning to others, especially China, against unilateral military action. Biden hammered that message home after talks with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in which the pair agreed to monitor Chinese naval activity and joint Chinese-Russia exercises.

Biden then went further. Asked if Washington was willing to get involved militarily to defend Taiwan, he replied: "Yes." "That's the commitment we made," he added. "We agreed with the One China policy, we signed on to it... but the idea that it can be taken by force is just not appropriate, it would dislocate the entire region and would be another action

The government responded to public outrage with new laws against such crimes, including—crucially—a ban on victims' families being allowed to pardon relatives or reach out-of-court "blood money" settlements.

Waseem was convicted and sentenced to life in jail, but his lawyers found a loophole. They successfully argued on appeal that the murder could not be classed as an "honour" killing—rendering the legal changes inapplicable, and allowing for his mother to pardon him.

That decision is being challenged by the state. Lawyers and activists blamed patriarchal mindsets within the justice system and a lack of women lawyers and judges for allowing "honour" killing verdicts to be overturned.

Pakistani courts are dominated by men, with less than a fifth of judges and only 12 percent of prosecutors being women, the HRCP says. Lawyer Nida Usman Chaudhary, who founded a collective for women jurists, said male judges often show bias in their interpretation of the honour killing laws.

"You've had the Supreme Court literally coming up with case law after case law where they developed an entire defence... to give impunity to the person who is accused," she told AFP. —AFP

similar to Ukraine," Biden said.

Biden directly linked the fates of Ukraine and Taiwan, saying Western sanctions on Russia must exact a "long-term price" because otherwise "what signal does that send to China about the cost of attempting to take Taiwan by force?" He warned Beijing was already "flirting with danger right now by flying so close and all the manoeuvres undertaken"—referring to a growing number of Chinese sorties, naval exercises and other power projections in the Taiwan Straits. In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin swiftly responded, declaring that "no one should underestimate the firm resolve, staunch will and strong ability of the Chinese people in defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity." —AFP

CONSUMER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT

RECALL INFORMATION

S-Class (223 Platform)

Mercedes-Benz Cars
Model: S-Class (223 Platform)
Model year: 2021 – 2022

RECALL REASON

Mercedes-Benz AG has determined that on certain S-Class (223 platform) vehicles the software of the rear signal acquisition and actuation module might not meet specifications. In this condition, this might lead to a malfunction of the rear turn signal, rear hazard warning lights and reversing lights. This would be indicated to the driver in the instrument cluster by corresponding warning messages. In the event of a fault, the risk of an accident or injury may increase. In addition, local legal requirements may not be complied with.

REMEDY

As a precautionary measure, Mercedes-Benz AG, via its Mercedes-Benz service partners, will update the software of the rear signal acquisition and actuation module on the affected vehicles. The required work will certainly be carried out free of charge.

CONTACT

Please contact Al Mulla Automobiles Co.
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Mercedes-Benz Service Centre - Al Shuwaikh Industrial Area - 13 Street
Mercedes-Benz Service Centre for Passenger Cars - Al Ahmadi - 29 Street.

This Recall is run pursuant to articles (42,43,44,45,46 and 47) of no. (39/2015) issuing the executive by laws of law no. (39/2014) on Consumer Protection.

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President Biden warns China against invading Taiwan

TOKYO: President Joe Biden vowed Monday that US forces would defend Taiwan militarily if China attempted to take control of the self-ruled island by force, warning Beijing was already "flirting with danger".

The remarks, made in Tokyo where he is meeting with Japan's prime minister ahead of a regional summit Tuesday, were Biden's strongest to date on the issue and come amid rising tensions over China's growing economic

International

Spain's ex-king visits son in Madrid for first time in two years

Ex-king had not seen his estranged wife, or his son since he fled to UAE

MADRID, Spain: Scandal-tainted Spanish ex-king Juan Carlos I visited his son and current monarch Felipe VI in Madrid on Monday, during a controversial trip home after two years in self-imposed exile. The meeting came at the end of the former king's first trip back to Spain since he moved to the United Arab Emirates in August 2020, following a string of financial scandals that damaged his reputation. Once revered for his role in easing Spain's transition to democracy following decades of dictatorship, the scandal forced Juan Carlos to abdicate in 2014, after nearly 40 years on the throne, and then to leave the country.

The 84-year-old former monarch flew into Spain on May 19 for a three-day regatta in the northwestern region of Galicia featuring his yacht the "Bribon". He arrived on Monday morning at the royal palace in Madrid directly from Sanexo, in Galicia.

The ex-king had not seen his estranged wife, Queen Sofia, or his son since he fled to the UAE, dogged by allegations of corruption. In a bid to try and restore the image of the monarchy, King Felipe VI has sought to distance himself from his father.

He has not visited him in exile and, officially, did not speak to him by phone until last week, when they arranged for Monday's private family visit. Juan Carlos was scheduled to leave for the UAE later in the day, the palace said.

Spanish prosecutors closed their probes into Juan Carlos I's financial affairs in March, in part because he was immune from prosecution until his abdication and because the statute of limitations had expired.

That decision triggered anger in some quarters, which was only exacerbated by the ex-king's return to Spain. "I think king Juan Carlos wasted the opportunity during this visit to give an explanation and apologise," Isabel Rodriguez, spokeswoman for the Socialist government told Spanish public radio RNE on Monday.



NEW YORK: File photo shows Fox News personalities, including Bret Baier, Martha MacCallum, Tucker Carlson, Laura Ingraham, and Sean Hannity, adorn the front of the News Corporation building, in New York City. — AFP

Juan Carlos made only brief, off-the-cuff remarks during his visit to Sanexo. "Explanations? What about?" he replied curtly when asked by journalists outside the yachting club if he would try to clarify the situation when he met his son. In March 2020, King Felipe ended his father's annual palace allowance, worth a reported 200,000 euros (\$210,000), and renounced his own claim on what he would have inherited from the king emeritus. Last month, he and the

government took steps to increase the transparency of the monarchy, via a decree requiring the palace to publish its budget and make tenders public. It also means the royal accounts will be audited, that senior palace officials must declare their personal wealth on taking up and leaving a post, and that gifts given to royals will be catalogued. "Felipe VI is doing a great job to restore transparency, which is essential for any state institution," Rodriguez said. — AFP

Sole survivor relives Yemenia Airways crash

PARIS: A woman who aged 12 survived the 2009 Yemenia Airways crash in the Comoros islands that killed all 152 others onboard described Monday the terrifying moments leading up to her plunge into the ocean and subsequent miraculous rescue, in the French trial against the airline. Bahia Bakari, now 25, has sat through several hearings with her father but had not testified or spoken to journalists attending the trial that opened this month.

"I didn't see how I was going to get through this," Bakari told the court of her hours spent in the water holding on to a piece of debris, with "the taste of jet fuel" in her mouth. Bakari and her mother left Paris on June 29, 2009, for a vacation in the Comoros, changing planes in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa for the final leg of the trip.

"It was a smaller plane, there were flies inside and it smelled strongly like a bathroom," she said, but "the flight went normally"—until the beginning of the landing descent. During the night-time approach of Flight Yemenia 626 to Moroni, the capital of the Comoros islands that lie between Mozambique and Madagascar, the Airbus A310 jet plunged into the Indian Ocean with its engines running at full throttle.

"I started to feel the turbulence, but nobody was reacting much, so I told myself it must be normal," Bakari said as over 100 family members or friends of the victims listened in silence. Suddenly "I felt something like an elec-



PARIS: File photo shows crash survivor Bahia Bakari leaving the courtroom for a break at The Paris' Courthouse in Paris, during the opening hearing in the case of the 2009 crash of a Yemenia Airways flight that killed all 152 of her fellow passengers and crew. — AFP

tric shock go through my body."

'Couldn't see anyone'

"There's a black hole between the moment when I was seated in the plane and the moment I found myself in the water." France's overseas territory of Mayotte is part of the Comoros archipelago, and 66 French citizens were among the 142 passengers and 11 crew members aboard.

Investigators and experts found there was nothing wrong with the aircraft, blaming instead "inappropriate actions by the crew during the approach to Moroni airport, leading to them losing control." No one from Yemenia Airlines has appeared at the trial, where prosecutors have accused the company of pilot training programmes "riddled with gaps" and of continuing to fly to

Moroni at night despite its non-functioning landing lights.

The company's lawyers have denied any wrongdoing. Yemenia is charged with involuntary homicide and injuries. Bakari, regaining consciousness in choppy waters, recalled waiting for hours in the water, trying to climb atop the largest piece of debris she could reach, but without the strength to succeed. "I realised that voices were calling for help in Comorian, and I cried out a bit but without much hope, because there's was nothing but water around me and I couldn't see anyone," she said. "I ended up falling asleep while holding onto the plane debris," and while she could see the coast when she woke up, "the water was really choppy."

'Hardest thing'

It was by thinking of her "incredibly protective" mother that allowed her to hold on until she was rescued by a boat after a dozen hours in the water. Initially she was convinced "that I was the only one who fell" and that the other passengers had arrived safely, before a psychologist at the hospital told her she was the only survivor.

"The hardest thing for me has been dealing with the grief for my mother, I was very close to her," Bakari said, her voice breaking and tears flowing for the first time during her testimony. The Yemeni national airline, whose representatives say they will not be in the dock due to the country's still-raging civil war, faces a maximum fine of 225,000 euros (\$240,000) for involuntary homicide and injuries. Although the plane's black boxes were found weeks after the crash, France accused the Comoros government of dragging its feet in the investigation, while victims' families accused Yemen of lobbying to hinder a trial. Around 560 people have joined the suit as plaintiffs, many of them from the region around Marseille in southern France, home to many of the victims. — AFP

Media workers arrested in Ethiopia raids

NAIROBI: At least nine media workers in Ethiopia's northern Amhara region have been arrested by local authorities, their employers said Monday, as rights activists warned of a sweep of unlawful detentions. Two outlets—the Nisir International Broadcasting Corporation and Ashara, both covering Ethiopian affairs on their YouTube channels—said their studios in Amhara were raided in recent days and staff taken away, some to undisclosed locations.

Nisir said four of its employees, including journalists and back office staff, were arrested and equipment seized from their workplace in Bahir Dar on Thursday and Friday by security forces and local police. The network, which broadcasts on a YouTube channel, said two of its staff were believed to be detained in a prison at Bahir Dar, while another two were being held 185 kilometres (115 miles) from the regional capital.

The whereabouts of two other Nisir journalists remained unknown, it added. "We urge the government to immediately release our journalists and return our studio equipment," the broadcaster said.

The other outlet, Ashara, said five of its staff were detained in a raid on their studio in Bahir Dar on Thursday and were being held in a detention centre outside the city. Authorities in Amhara, the second-most populous region in Ethiopia, said over 4,000 people suspected of crimes had been arrested in an ongoing enforcement operation.

"The government will continue in a reinvigorated manner this peacekeeping work/activity," said Desalegn Tassew, head of Amhara's Peace and Security Bureau, in a statement published on state media.

On Sunday the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the state-affiliated independent rights body, expressed concern about a spate of arrests that had netted "journalists and social activists". The commission said while some detainees had been granted visitations or charged, "many other detainees have been unlawfully detained, have not been brought before court and have not been visited by family".

"Especially in the Amhara region, many detainees have been arrested in detention centres far from their home areas and arbitrarily detained, making it difficult for family members to know their whereabouts."

TV host Solomon Shumye, who has a show on YouTube, was also detained in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Friday and accused of inciting violence, his sister Tigist Shumye said. Amhara authorities backed Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his federal forces in a war with the neighbouring Tigray region that began in November 2020. But divisions have since emerged over Abiy's handling of the conflict. — AFP

Monster sandstorm barrels into...

Continued from Page 1

The Iraqi capital Baghdad was enveloped in a giant dust cloud that left usually traffic-choked streets largely deserted and bathed in an eerie orange light, AFP correspondents said. Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi ordered all work to cease in state-run institutions, except for health and security services, citing "poor climatic conditions and the arrival of violent sandstorms".

Air traffic was suspended at the international airports in Baghdad, Arbil and Najaf, before flights resumed at Baghdad and Arbil. Iraq is ranked as one of the world's five most vulnerable nations to climate change and desertification. The environment ministry has warned that over the next two decades Iraq could endure an average of 272 days of sandstorms per year, rising to above 300 by 2050. Iraq's previous

two sandstorms sent nearly 10,000 people to hospital with respiratory problems and killed one person.

The Middle East has always been battered by sandstorms, but they have become more frequent and intense in recent years. The trend is associated with rising temperatures and water scarcity, the overuse and damming of rivers as well as overgrazing and deforestation. Oil-rich Iraq is known in Arabic as the land of the two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, where the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia flourished.

Iraq's environment ministry has said the increased sandstorms could be countered with more vegetation cover including trees that act as windbreaks. A major dust storm last week swept across the region, reaching Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. It left more than 1,200 people hospitalized in Riyadh alone. In Dubai, the world's tallest building was engulfed in a cloud of dust. Experts predict the phenomenon will worsen as climate change warps regional weather patterns, further dries out and degrades soils and speeds up desertification across much of the Middle East. — Agencies

address the underlying causes that force innocent people to flee their homes."

The 100 million figure amounts to more than one percent of the global population, while only 13 countries have a bigger population than the number of forcibly displaced people in the world. The figures combine refugees, asylum-seekers, as well as more than 50 million people displaced inside their own countries. "The international response to people fleeing war in Ukraine has been overwhelmingly positive," said Grandi.

"Compassion is alive and we need a similar mobilization for all crises around the world. But ultimately, humanitarian aid is a palliative, not a cure. "To reverse this trend, the only answer is peace and stability so that innocent people are not forced to gamble between acute danger at home or precarious flight and exile." UNHCR will outline the full data on forced displacement in 2021 in its annual Global Trends Report, due for release on June 16. — AFP

More than 100m people forcibly...

Continued from Page 1

of 2021, spurred by violence in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Nigeria, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb 24 and since then, more than eight million people have been displaced within the country, while more than six million refugees have fled across the borders. "One hundred million is a stark figure - sobering and alarming in equal measure. It's a record that should never have been set," said UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi. "This must serve as a wake-up call to resolve and prevent destructive conflicts, end persecution, and

Oman, Iran sign deals; Raisi warns...

Continued from Page 1

The countries signed 12 memoranda of understanding during the visit, including in the fields of oil and gas, transport, education, trade and investment, reported the official Oman News Agency.

"Trade exchanges between the two countries of Oman and Iran will improve definitely," Raisi said before departure, according to Iran's state news agency IRNA. "Both countries are determined to upgrade the level of political and economic ties," he added. A delegation of 50 Iranian businessmen travelled to Oman last week, IRNA said, adding that Iran's minister for roads and urban development has announced plans for a joint shipping line and tourist flights.

Oman is also seeking to import gas from Iran by building an offshore pipeline between the two countries, who are discussing the development of joint gas fields offshore. The sultanate, which faces Iran across the Gulf of Oman, endured economic pain during the pandemic, with its GDP dropping 6.4 percent in 2020 and government debt soaring. It saw rare protests over high unemployment and lay-offs last year.

Raisi visited Qatar in February, where he met with Amir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and took part in a conference of gas exporting countries. Stop-start talks to bring Iran back to the 2015 deal curbing its nuclear ambitions in return for a lifting of sanctions that was abandoned by former US president Donald Trump in 2018, began in April last year.

Earlier on Monday, Raisi warned Iran will avenge the killing of a Revolutionary Guards colonel who was shot dead in Tehran. Assaults on motorcycles on Sunday hit Colonel Sayyad Khodai with five bullets as he sat in his car outside his home. Iran blamed "elements linked to the global arrogance" - the Islamic republic's term for its arch

enemy the United States and US allies including the Zionist entity.

It was the most high-profile killing inside Iran since the Nov 2020 murder of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh. Raisi said: "I insist on the serious pursuit (of the killers) by security officials, and I have no doubt that the blood of this great martyr will be avenged. There is no doubt that the hand of global arrogance can be seen in this crime," he added, echoing the Guards' assertion, before he travelled to Oman.

A memorial service for Khodai was scheduled in Tehran at 5:00 pm local time (1230 GMT) on Monday. The funeral will take place at 8:00 am (0330 GMT) on Tuesday in Imam Hossein Square in central Tehran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp said in a statement. The ideological arm of Iran's military, the Guards described Khodai as a "defender of the sanctuary", a term used for those who work on behalf of Iran in Syria or Iraq.

Iran maintains significant political influence in both countries and has backed President Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria's grinding civil war. State television noted that Khodai was "known" in Syria, where Iran has acknowledged deploying "military advisers". The official news agency IRNA said Khodai was killed by five bullets as he returned home Sunday at around 4:00 pm.

The agency published pictures showing a man slumped over in the driver's seat of a white car, with blood around the collar of his blue shirt and on his right arm. He was strapped in with his seat-belt, and the front window on the passenger side had been shot out. The Fars news agency reported that the state prosecutor had visited the scene of the killing and ordered the "quick identification and arrest of the authors of this criminal act".

The Guards said they had arrested several "thugs linked to the intelligence agency of the Zionist regime," as Iran calls its enemy. A statement said the suspects had been involved in a series of crimes, including "robberies, kidnappings and vandalism". "The dimensions of this assassination are being investigated," said the spokesman for the joint chiefs of staff of the Iranian armed forces, General Abolfazl Shakarji. — AFP

International

New Australian PM Albanese heads to Tokyo with climate message

'It is China that has changed, not Australia'

CANBERRA, Australia: Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese took the oath of office Monday and immediately flew to a Tokyo summit with a "message to the world" that his country is ready to engage on climate change.

The 59-year-old centre-left Labor Party leader was sworn in during a brief televised ceremony at Government House in Canberra. In a hurried post-election schedule, he flew out of the country shortly afterwards to join a Tokyo summit with the US, Japanese and Indian leaders, known as the Quad.

Albanese said he would meet one-on-one with each leader in Japan. But he singled out the United States as Australia's "most important partner" and noted that President Joe Biden called him the previous evening for a "fruitful" conversation.

The Tokyo talks will be "a good way to send a message to the world that there's a new government in Australia", Albanese said in his first news conference as prime minister. "It's a government that represents a change in terms of the way that we deal with the world on issues like climate change."

On China, Albanese said the relationship with Beijing would "remain a difficult one". The two countries have not held ministerial-level talks in two years, and China's government has hit a range of Australian goods with politically tinged sanctions.

"It is China that has changed, not Australia, and Australia should always stand up for our values," he said. But he also vowed not to "play politics" with national security, a common ploy by the outgoing conservative government that helped fray ties with Beijing further.

'Optimism and hope'

Albanese has frequently reflected on his personal journey towards the nation's highest office after

being brought up by his struggling single mother in Sydney public housing. The new leader says he wants to transform his country, too.

In recent years, images of smouldering eucalypt forests, smog-enveloped cities and blanched-out coral reefs have made Australia a poster child for climate-fuelled destruction. Under conservative leadership, the country-already one of the world's largest gas and coal exporters-has also become synonymous with playing the spoiler at international climate talks.

That record allowed a score of independent candidates-mostly women offering climate and anti-corruption measures-to plunder once-safe conservative Liberal Party urban seats. Albanese has vowed to adopt more ambitious emissions reduction targets and make the sun-kissed continent-nation a renewable energy superpower.

He set out a string of other goals, too: setting up a national anti-corruption commission, giving indigenous people a constitutional right to be consulted about policies that affect them, and offering affordable childcare to

allow more women to work. "I look forward to leading a government that makes Australians proud, that does not seek to divide," he added. "People do have conflict fatigue."

'Down to business'

Official results showed Labor was expected to win in 75 seats-almost within reach of the 76 required for a majority in the 151-seat lower house. A handful of other races are still too close to call. Albanese said a Labor majority "looks most likely". But he had already secured support from five independent and small party members to ensure Labor can govern.

After the meetings with Quad leaders on



CANBERRA: Australia's new Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (L) shakes hands with Australia's Governor General David Hurley (R) after taking an oath at Government House in Canberra on May 23, 2022. —AFP

Tuesday, Albanese said he would return to Australia the following day and convene a meeting of his ministers next week. His top team include Foreign Minister Penny Wong, who will join the prime minister in Tokyo, Treasurer Jim Chalmers and Finance Minister Katy Gallagher- all sworn in Monday.

Notable among the foreign leaders who have welcomed Albanese's election are the ones from Australia's Pacific Island neighbours, whose very existence is threatened by rising sea levels. "Of your many promises to support the Pacific, none is more welcome than your plan to put the climate first-our people's shared future depends on it," said

Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama.

It is already clear that the vote was a political earthquake in Australia. For many Australians, the election was a referendum on polarising former prime minister Scott Morrison. Voters responded at the ballot box with a sharp rebuke of his Liberal-National coalition-ousting top ministers from parliament and virtually expelling the party from major cities.

For Morrison's conservative allies, the defeat is already spurring a battle for the soul of the party. A leadership contest is informally underway, with moderates blaming the loss on a drift to the right. —AFP

Seven killed after fire engulfs Philippine ferry

MANILA: At least seven people were killed and scores plucked to safety in the Philippines on Monday after a fire ripped through a ferry and forced passengers to jump overboard, the coast guard and witnesses said.

The blaze broke out on the Mercraft 2 at around 6:30 am (2230 GMT Sunday) as it carried 134 passengers and crew from Polillo Island to Real in Quezon province on the main island of Luzon. Seven people died and 127 were rescued, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Commodore Armando Balilo said after the last missing were found.

The fibreglass fast craft boat, which had a 186-person capacity, was about a kilometre from Real when it caught fire. "We heard an explosion," said Kysel Pineda, 18, who was travelling on another ferry.

"When we saw the boat, it was already engulfed by fire and passengers were already floating in the sea," the high school student added. Thick black smoke billowed from the Mercraft as flames tore through the entire vessel, photos shared by the coast guard showed.

People with life rings and life vests were in the



REAL, Philippines: This photo released on May 23, 2022 from the Philippine Coastguard shows the remains of a ferry near Real town, Quezon province. At least seven people were killed and scores plucked to safety in the Philippines on May 23 after a fire ripped through a ferry. —AFP

water. Some were rescued by other ferries or clambered into inflatable boats. The fire appears to have started in the engine room, Balilo said. A team of investigators was preparing to look into the cause.

"We were able to rescue 40 survivors," said Captain Brunette Azagra, whose passenger vessel was 500 metres from the Mercraft when the fire broke out. Two bodies were also pulled from the water, he added.

"They were lucky, because we also came from Polillo. They overtook us, but we were just nearby," Azagra told a local radio station, describing sea conditions as "quite good". Twenty-four people were injured, including the captain of the ferry,

Instagram of a rainbow flag on its premises to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. It was accompanied by a message of support for LGBTQ rights.

A backlash ensued among conservative Indonesians online in response to the social media post and on Monday Jakarta's foreign ministry summoned British ambassador Owen Jenkins to explain. "The action, along with the publication (of the picture) through the official social media account of the British embassy, is highly insensitive," ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah told AFP on Monday.

"The ministry would like to remind foreign envoys to respect the sensitivity of cultural and religious values," he added. The embassy did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

Influential conservatives had chastised the embassy for flying the rainbow flag alongside the UK's Union Flag. The chairman of Indonesia's top

He left open the possibility of resuscitating his father's failed venture-an idea he is now pushing ahead of his June 30 inauguration. Marcos said he met South Korean Ambassador to Manila Kim Inchul on Monday to discuss a proposal on reviving the Bataan plant.

"Can we continue with it or do we need to build a new one? What are the things that we will have to do?" Marcos told a news conference after the meeting. "So we revived the discussions on it, although they have come before. We will now study their recommendations and their findings, and we will see if we can still apply," he added. Studies by South Korean and Russian experts showed it was possible to get the plant working again. Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi told a Senate hearing in 2020. But upgrading an ageing facility fitted with outdated analogue technology could take at least four years and cost another \$1 billion.

There are also question marks on its design and location. A monument to the greed and graft of the

elder Marcos's era, the plant sits 80 kilometres (50 miles) west of Manila, near several volcanoes in a part of the Philippines regularly shaken by earthquakes.

Islamic scholars body, the Indonesian Ulema Council, said the diplomatic mission was disrespectful for openly supporting LGBTQ rights.

"We must reprimand them that as a guest, one must know their place and understand the norms in the country where they're at," Cholil Nafis wrote to his 68,000 Twitter followers on Saturday.

Same-sex relationships are illegal in Indonesia's conservative province of Aceh, where they can result in public flogging under local Islamic law. Though tolerated elsewhere in the country, the LGBTQ community has faced growing pressure on their rights and freedoms.

Islamists and conservative lawmakers have tried to criminalise same-sex relationships and openly gay people often face discrimination. Conversion therapy including exorcism to "cure" homosexuality is still common and gay sex is prohibited in the military. —AFP

Supporters of nuclear power say the technology offers a cleaner option to help meet demand. But critics argue that renewable sources, such as wind and solar, are cheaper and safer to produce in a country hit by earthquakes, typhoons and volcanic eruptions. —AFP

Building a new power plant from scratch would take three to seven years, he added. Outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte issued an executive order earlier this year making nuclear power part of the country's planned energy mix. The Philippines-regularly affected by electricity outages-relies on imported carbon-belching coal for more than half of its power generation.

Supporters of nuclear power say the technology offers a cleaner option to help meet demand. But critics argue that renewable sources, such as wind and solar, are cheaper and safer to produce in a country hit by earthquakes, typhoons and volcanic eruptions. —AFP

Supporters of nuclear power say the technology offers a cleaner option to help meet demand. But critics argue that renewable sources, such as wind and solar, are cheaper and safer to produce in a country hit by earthquakes, typhoons and volcanic eruptions. —AFP

News in brief

Austrian ex-minister quits Rosneft

MOSCOW: Austrian ex-foreign minister Karin Kneissl, who once danced with Russian President Vladimir Putin at her wedding, has quit a board position at Russian oil giant Rosneft, the company said Monday. Kneissl has submitted a letter of resignation effective from Friday, Rosneft said in a statement. The 57-year-old made headlines when she invited Putin to her wedding in 2018 and was photographed dancing with him during the event. She left the Austrian government the following year and joined the board of Rosneft as an independent director in June last year. Her resignation comes after Rosneft announced Friday that German ex-chancellor Gerhard Schroeder was leaving the board after five years, a day after Germany stripped him of official perks over ties with Russia. —AFP

Greece blocks migrants

ATHENS: Greece said on Monday it had prevented around 600 migrants from crossing the Aegean into its territorial waters from neighbouring Turkey, in the largest attempted entry this year. A spokesman for the Greek coast-guard said five sail boats and four dinghies had set off from the Turkish coast early in the morning. "Greek patrol vessels were able to quickly locate the vessels and inform the Turkish coastguard," the spokesman told AFP. All the vessels either headed back or were intercepted, he added. "All the incidents occurred inside Turkish territorial waters" between the Greek islands of Chios and Samos, he said. Athens regularly blames Ankara for not taking sufficient action to curb people smugglers who send out migrants in unsafe boats and dinghies from its shores, in breach of a 2016 accord with the European Union. —AFP

Canada storms' death toll up

OTTAWA: The death toll from powerful storms that lashed eastern Canada over the weekend has risen to at least eight, authorities said Sunday. Police in the province of Ontario announced on CTVNews the deaths of seven people, killed Saturday by falling trees and branches. The eighth victim was a woman who drowned when her boat capsized in the Ottawa River, near Gatineau, a Quebec suburb of the federal capital Ottawa. Strong winds, with gusts of more than 140 kilometres (87 miles) per hour, battered eastern Canada on Saturday, the national weather service said, adding that the storm was a rare phenomenon called "derecho". "This storm was almost about 1,000 kilometers" long. Environment Canada Senior Climatologist David Phillips told local station CFRA on Sunday. "That's what a derecho is, it's a long line of very active thunderstorms or microburst kind of situations," he said. —AFP

Indonesia summons Britain envoy over rainbow flag

JAKARTA: Indonesia summoned Britain's ambassador on Monday over an LGBTQ flag displayed at the UK embassy, with Jakarta calling on foreign envoys to respect local sensitivities in a country where same-sex relationships remain taboo.

Gay sex is legal in the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation, except in one province, but there is widespread discrimination against the LGBTQ community and some gay Indonesians have been arrested under an anti-pornography law.

The embassy last week posted a picture on

Philippines' Marcos in nuke plant revival talks with S Korea

MANILA: Philippine president-elect Ferdinand Marcos signalled his determination to adopt nuclear power Monday, holding talks with South Korea's envoy on possibly reviving a mothballed \$2.2 billion plant built during his father's dictatorship.

The 620-megawatt Bataan Nuclear Power Plant was left dormant after the elder Marcos was toppled in 1986. In the run-up to the May 9 presidential election, Marcos Junior spoke about the need for nuclear power to address exorbitant electricity costs in the country.

Business

TUESDAY, MAY 24, 2022

US unveils Asia-Pacific trade framework; questions remain

13 countries including India and Japan sign up

TOKYO: US President Joe Biden launched a new Asia-Pacific trade initiative Monday in Tokyo, with 13 countries including India and Japan signed up, although questions about the pact's effectiveness remain. Biden formally unveiled the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, or IPEF, on his second day in Japan, where he held talks with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida ahead of a regional Quad summit on Tuesday.

Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam.

The countries touted IPEF as a framework for what will ultimately become a tight-knit group of trading nations. "We share a commitment to a free, open, fair, inclusive, interconnected, resilient, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region," they said in a joint statement.

"Deepening economic engagement among partners is crucial for continued growth, peace, and prosperity."

Rebuilding alliances

Together, the participants account for about 40 percent of global GDP and "there are other countries that could conceivably join us," Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told reporters. Biden has pushed to rapidly rebuild strategic military and trade alliances weakened under his predecessor Donald Trump since taking office in 2021. IPEF is intended to offer US allies an alternative to China's growing commercial presence across the Asia-Pacific.

However, there is no political will in Washington for returning to a tariffs-based Asia trade deal following Trump's 2017 withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership—a huge trading bloc that was revived under a new name in 2018, without US membership.

While the TPP reduces trade barriers for members, US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo emphasized to reporters that IPEF was not designed to go down the same route. The "framework is intentionally designed not to be a same old, same old traditional trade



TOKYO: (From left to right) Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, US President Joe Biden, and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi attend the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity at the Izumi Garden Gallery in Tokyo on May 23, 2022. — AFP



Participants account for 40% of global GDP

"I believe we'll win the competition of the 21st century together," he said at the launch, attended in person by Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and virtually by representatives from the other countries. Unlike traditional trade blocs, there is no plan for IPEF members to negotiate tariffs and ease market access—a tool that has become increasingly unpalatable to US voters fearful of seeing homegrown manufacturing undermined.

Instead, the program foresees integrating partners through agreed standards in four main areas: the digital economy, supply chains, clean energy infrastructure and anti-corruption measures. The starting list of members in addition to the United States is Australia,

agreement," she said.

Even so, Japan's Kishida said there is a desire for US involvement in the larger pact abandoned by Trump. The country welcomes the new framework and will "participate and cooperate", he said, but "from a strategic standpoint, Japan hopes that the United States will return to the TPP".

No Taiwan

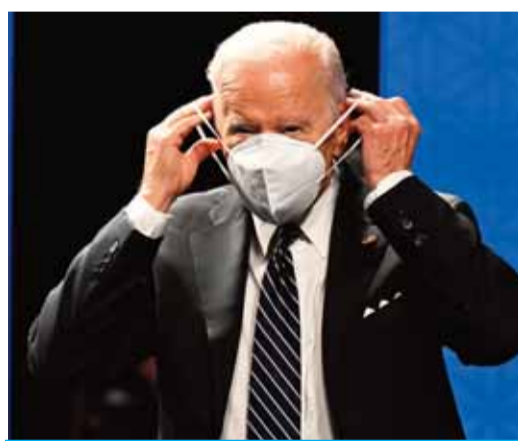
China has criticized IPEF as an attempt to create a closed club. Sullivan rejected this, saying "it is by design and

definition an open platform." Taiwan, the self-governing democracy that China claims sovereignty over, has pointedly not been brought into the initial line-up despite being an important link in supply chains for microchips. Sullivan said nevertheless that the United States is "looking to deepen our economic partnership with Taiwan, including on high-technology issues, including on semiconductors and supply chains". This will happen, however, only "on a bilateral basis".

From the start, the US initiative faced skepticism. Without offering

increased access to the huge US market, it is unclear what enforcement mechanisms could be applied to promote the proposed integration. But Raimondo said IPEF would be a powerful force, suggesting that if it had been in place before the COVID-19 pandemic the United States would have "experienced much less disruption" in the subsequent supply chain crisis. And more broadly, the US trade-boosting initiative is welcomed by businesses that "increasingly look for alternatives to China", she said. — AFP

Biden says US recession not inevitable



TOKYO: US President Joe Biden adjusts his mask as he attends the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity at the Izumi Garden Gallery in Tokyo on May 23, 2022. — AFP

TOKYO: A recession in the United States is not inevitable, President Joe Biden said Monday, while acknowledging the economic pain experienced by Americans as inflation soars.

Speaking in Tokyo, Biden replied "no" when asked if a US recession is inevitable. "This is going to be a haul, this is going to take some time," Biden said. The US economy has recovered strongly from its Covid-19 era shutdown, but the highest inflation in four decades and persistent problems in getting international supply chains flowing again are driving pessimism—and Biden's sinking poll numbers.

Biden blamed inflation on fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other global problems and he defended US economic performance. "We have problems the rest of the world has but less consequential," he said.

While acknowledging the high fuel prices and food supply crunches caused by the war in wheat-producing Ukraine, Biden said his administration would continue to "grow our economy, create jobs".

Last week Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said "I really don't expect the United States to fall into a recession". However, she cautioned that European countries, which are among the biggest US trading partners, "are more vulnerable" due to reliance on Russian energy imports. — AFP

Inflation in crisis-hit Sri Lanka hits new record

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's inflation hit a seventh consecutive record high in April as a petrol shortage worsened and food prices rose sharply, official data showed Monday. The National Consumer Price Index rose 33.8 percent year-on-year in April, more than six times the 5.5 percent inflation of a year earlier.

Annual food inflation stood at 45.1 percent, according to the latest data released by the Department of Census and Statistics. Hammered by a foreign exchange crisis, the country's 22 million people have been enduring acute shortages of essentials—including food and medicines—for months.

Protests are continuing outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office demanding his resignation over the unprecedented economic turmoil. Inflation is likely to rise further in May as fuel price hikes of 35 percent for petrol and 65 percent for diesel—commonly used in public transport—feed into the wider economy. Petrol remains in short supply with long queues outside the few pumping stations still distributing the fuel.

Sri Lanka asked the International Monetary Fund last month for emergency assistance. The country has defaulted on its \$51 billion external debt and is seeking international aid to revive the bankrupt economy. The economy has collapsed since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, with a nosedive in tourism revenues and foreign worker remittances.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka appointed six more ministers on Monday to its new "economic war cabinet", the president's office said, but left vacant the crucial finance portfolio. Sri Lanka is facing its worst-ever shortage of foreign exchange reserves, with the government unable to finance even the most essential

Oxfam tells Davos: Time to tax growing billionaire club

DAVOS: The COVID pandemic has created a new billionaire every 30 hours and now one million people could fall into extreme poverty at the same pace, Oxfam said Monday as the Davos summit returns. The international charity said it was time to tax the rich to support the less fortunate as the global elite gathered at the Swiss mountain haven for the World Economic Forum after a two-year COVID-induced absence.

Oxfam said it expects 263 million people to sink into extreme poverty this year, at a rate of one million every 33 hours, as soaring inflation has added a cost-



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: People queue to buy Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders in Colombo on May 23, 2022. — AFP

imports such as food, fuel and medicines. Last week, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's office said the new premier was expected to be given the additional responsibility of managing the country's finances to pull it out of bankruptcy.

There was no explanation from President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office on Monday about why he was not given the job. Political sources said several other legislators from the president's Sri Lanka Podujana Peremuna (SLPP) party had declined to take up portfolios.

"There is tension between the SLPP and others in the unity government," a government official involved in the cabinet formation told AFP. "At least four MPs have refused to take up ministries."

Wickremesinghe took over earlier this month after Mahinda Rajapaksa, the president's elder brother, resigned after months of anti-government protests

turned violent, with at least nine people killed.

Wickremesinghe, 73, had pledged to put together a cross-party coalition after the previous cabinet was dissolved. The new ministers—for fisheries, agriculture, transport, environment, culture and irrigation—were sworn in before the president at his tightly-guarded official residence in Colombo.

The delay in getting a finance minister could hinder the IMF negotiations about a bailout, the central bank chief warned on Thursday. The country of 22 million people has been enduring severe economic hardships for months. Consumers have been unable to access petrol, diesel and cooking gas, while staple food has been rationed. The country is also facing record inflation and lengthy daily electricity blackouts. Last month, Sri Lanka announced it would default on its \$51 billion external loans as the country ran out of dollars. — AFP

of-living crisis on top of COVID. By comparison, 573 people became billionaires during the pandemic, or one every 30 hours.

"Billionaires are arriving in Davos to celebrate an incredible surge in their fortunes," Oxfam executive director Gabriela Bucher said in a statement. "The pandemic and now the steep increases in food and energy prices have, simply put, been a bonanza for them," Bucher said.

"Meanwhile, decades of progress on extreme poverty are now in reverse and millions of people are facing impossible rises in the cost of simply staying alive," she said. Oxfam called for a one-off "solidarity tax" on billionaires' pandemic windfall to support people facing soaring prices as well as fund a "fair and sustainable recovery" from the pandemic.

It also said it was time to "end crisis profiteering" by rolling out a "temporary excess profit tax" of 90 percent on windfall profits of big corporations. — AFP



DAVOS: Swiss President Ignazio Cassis delivers a speech at the Congress centre during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos on May 23, 2022. — AFP

Business

ECB plans end to negative rates era as inflation soars

Lagarde hints at raising interest rates by end of third quarter

FRANKFURT: Negative interest rates will soon be a thing of the past in the eurozone, the ECB's chief signaled Monday, with the bank poised to raise rates for the first time in over a decade to tamp down soaring inflation. The Frankfurt-based institution was "likely to be in a position to exit negative interest rates by the end of the third quarter", ECB President Christine Lagarde wrote in a blog post.

The clear time frame for rate rises came as the ECB plays catch up with other central banks in responding to surging inflation. Lagarde had previously argued that sharp leaps in consumer prices, driven in part by the waning effect of COVID-19 pandemic, were likely to subside in a few months.

But Russia's war in Ukraine has thrown a new spanner in the works, worsening already disrupted supply chains and throwing up new shortages in essential material from wheat to metals.

Energy prices were also on the march, as Western economies including Germany—the eurozone's biggest—scramble to wean themselves off Russian power. Consumer prices soared at a rate of 7.5 percent in the eurozone in April, an all-time high for the currency club and well above the bank's two-percent target. The renewed surge has already prompted a sharp response from many central banks.

The US Federal Reserve raised rates by an unusually large 50 basis points at the beginning of May, while the Bank of England sealed its fourth consecutive hike. The euro climbed one percent against the dollar following Lagarde's comments, having struggled as the Fed acted more aggressively to fight inflation.

First hike

The end of the ECB's bond-buying stimulus program "very early in the third quarter" would pave the way for a "rate lift-off at our meeting in July", Lagarde said. The initial hike would lift rates from their current historically low levels. These include a minus 0.5 deposit rate which effectively charges banks to park their excess cash at the ECB overnight.

Any hikes beyond zero would be dependent on the "inflation outlook", Lagarde said. If the forecasted rate of inflation appeared to be stabilizing around the ECB's two-percent target, further increases "will be appropriate". Policymakers will be keeping an especially close eye on the development of wages for fear pay increases could stoke inflation further.

Wage rises in the first quarter of 2022 had been "moderate", the German central bank said in a report also published Monday. But the Bundesbank warned that the ballooning cost of living could lead to



KOENIGSWINTER, Germany: Germany's Finance Minister Christian Lindner welcomes President of the European Central Bank (ECB) Christine Lagarde (left) before a meeting of finance ministers and central bankers from the Group of Seven industrialized nations (G7) on May 19, 2022 at the Petersberg in Koenigswinter near Bonn, western Germany. — AFP

"stronger rises" in Europe's largest economy in the near future.

Following Lagarde's comments, Commerzbank senior economist, Michael Schubert, said he expected the ECB "to raise the deposit rate by 25 basis points at each of its seven meetings between July and April"

next year. The hiking streak would bring the key rate to 1.25 percent, he said, but warned the ECB may need to go further in order to bring inflation under control.

ECB policymakers next meet to decide their course of action on June 9 and July 21, with the July date seen as the most likely for the first hike. — AFP



RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany: In this handout photo taken and provided by the US Air Force on May 22, 2022, a C-17 Globemaster III assigned to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, carries pallets of infant formula at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. — AFP

US flight brings tons of baby formula from Germany

WASHINGTON: A US military plane bringing several tons of much-needed baby formula from Germany landed Sunday at an airport in Indiana as authorities scramble to address a critical shortage. Scarcity of medical-grade baby formula caused by production problems and supply-chain issues has created grave problems for thousands of parents whose infants rely on it, sending them in frantic searches for the product. The cargo plane took off from the US air base at Ramstein, Germany, carrying more than 70,000 pounds of powdered formula, the White House said.

President Joe Biden posted about the flight on Twitter from Japan, where he is on a five-day Asia trip. "Our team is working around the clock to get safe formula to everyone who needs it," he said.

Biden tweeted an update later Sunday, saying more formula was on its way to the United States via a second shipment. "We have secured a second flight to transport Nestle specialty infant formula to Pennsylvania," the president posted.

"The flight and trucking will take place in the coming days, and I will continue to keep you updated," he said. The first shipment will cover about 15 percent of the immediate need, presidential economics advisor Brian Deese said on CNN.

He added there are "more flights in train that will be

coming in early this week" as part of what the administration has dubbed "Operation Fly Formula." The formula was flown to Indiana because it is a hub for Nestle, a major domestic producer. It will be quality-tested at a nearby lab before being distributed. The formula shortage has been developing for months, aggravated not only by supply-chain issues linked to the Covid-19 pandemic but by the closing of the largest US formula-making plant, a Michigan factory owned by Abbott Laboratories, amid concerns that contamination may have led to the deaths of two infants.

"We had a manufacturer that wasn't following the rules, and that was making formula that had the risk of making babies sick," Deese said. "So we have to take action."

Another problem, he said, was that US formula production had become concentrated among just three companies. "We're going to have to work" on ways to increase competition, he said.

Abbott's CEO, Robert Ford, apologized to consumers in a Washington Post op-ed Sunday, saying: "We're sorry to every family we've let down since our voluntary recall exacerbated our nation's baby formula shortage." Deese was asked separately about growing concerns that the US economy-hit by high inflation, supply chain troubles and the war in Ukraine—may be headed toward a recession.

"Well, there are always risks," he said. "But there's also no doubt that the United States is in a better position than any other major country around the world to address inflation without giving up all the economic gains that we have had." The US inflation rate hit a 40-year high of 8.5 percent in March, but slowed slightly in April to 8.3 percent. —AFP



Money conference. While HSBC would not confirm whether Kirk had been suspended, HSBC chief executive Noel Quinn posted on LinkedIn that the comments were "inconsistent with HSBC's strategy and do not reflect the views of the senior leadership of HSBC or HSBC Asset Management".

"Our ambition is to be the leading bank supporting the global economy in the transition to net zero."

HSBC and its peers have come under fierce pressure from activist groups over their continued funding of projects deemed harmful to the environment, such as fossil fuel exploration. Regarding HSBC, "investors and customers should rightly question and scrutinize the bank's promises on climate, including its upcoming oil and gas policy", Beau O'Sullivan, senior campaigner at activist group Bank on our Future, said in a statement. — AFP

HSBC suspends banker over climate comments

LONDON: HSBC bank has suspended its head of responsible investing after he hit out at climate change warnings during a recent presentation, media reported Monday. The London-headquartered bank has suspended Stuart Kirk while HSBC investigates the incident first reported by the Financial Times.

Kirk reportedly told a conference held in the British capital last week that there is "always some nut job telling me about the end of the world" and is said to have showed slides stating that "unsubstantiated, shrill, partisan, self-serving, apocalyptic warnings are ALWAYS wrong".

In the presentation, entitled "Why investors need not worry about climate risk", he is said to have accused officials at the United Nations and the Bank of England of overstating the financial risks of climate change. "Who cares if Miami is six meters underwater in 100 years? Amsterdam has been six metres underwater for ages and that's a really nice place," Kirk is reported to have told the Financial Times' Moral

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.625 percent.

EU extends budget rule suspension

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Monday extended through 2023 its suspension of rules against overspending by the bloc's governments, prolonging a pandemic-era reprieve because of Russia's war in Ukraine. "Heightened uncertainty and strong downside risks to the economic outlook in the context of war in Ukraine, unprecedented energy price hikes and continued supply chain disturbances warrant the extension," the EU's executive, the European Commission, said.

The EU suspended the public spending rules for national governments in March 2020 as the 27-nation bloc sank into its deepest recession since World War II because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Known as the Stability and Growth Pact, the EU rules limit deficit spending to three percent of a country's overall economy and debt to 60 percent. The pact was supposed to be reactivated on January 1, 2023, with the return of solid growth but Russia's invasion of Ukraine has changed the situation. "The commission said the rules would now be reimposed "as of 2024".

"This provides a space for national fiscal policies to react quickly if and when needed," said Commission Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis. The pledge to restore the rules will hopefully reassure Germany and its "frugal" allies in northern Europe, who are fervent defenders of budgetary rigor.—AFP

Manufacturers getting to grips with airless tires

COLMAR-BERG, Luxembourg: Airless tires that never go flat or need to be inflated: It's a decades-long dream that manufacturers hope to turn into a reality soon, but for truck drivers first. The challenges that the technology faces were put on display at a Goodyear test track in Luxembourg, where a group of journalists put a Tesla equipped with airless tires through its paces.

Instead of being filled with air, the tires have a web of spokes that keep the wheels firm and give them a see-through look. The thin layer of rubber gripping the asphalt has a gargantuan physical challenge to meet—supporting the weight of the car and absorbing shocks as well as standard pneumatic tires for thousands and thousands of kilometers. That challenge is being overcome: the tire's rubber and plastic structure resisted the huge stress as the car banked into the track's tight turns. The ride is smooth but the grip is not as good as on conventional tires—and they are noisier.

The tires were tested for 120,000 kilometers (75,000 miles) at speeds of up to 160 kph in both scorching temperatures as well as snow, said Michael Rachita, who heads up Goodyear's efforts to develop airless tires. "The most obvious advantage is that it's puncture proof," said Rachita.

"It will never run flat, you could drive over any nail and expect not to lose performance," he added. Rachita said airless tires will also be maintenance free for drivers as they will never need to check and adjust air pressure. He said a second generation of airless tires that are lighter, quieter and roll better are in the works.

Gradual transition seen

Michelin has released the Tweel, but it is for construction vehicles rather than cars where the demands in terms of driving performance are much greater.

The French firm has also unveiled the Uptis which it

Euro rallies as ECB signals end to negative rates

FRANKFURT: The euro jumped one percent versus the dollar Monday after European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde signaled the end of ECB negative interest rates.

The euro struck a one-month high at \$1.0688 after Lagarde said the central bank would probably draw a line under the era of negative interest rates by September owing to soaring eurozone inflation. "That's something that we were waiting for so long," noted Swiss quote analyst Ipek Ozkardeska.

"Lagarde is finally showing that the (inflation) situation is serious in Europe as well," she told AFP.

Central banks around the world are increasing interest rates to tackle the highest inflation in decades but so far the ECB has refused to follow the likes of the Federal Reserve and Bank of England in hiking borrowing costs from record-low levels. Eurozone inflation soared by an all-time high 7.5 percent in April. The surge has been driven by soaring energy and food prices as economies reopen from pandemic lockdowns and following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Oil prices jumped more than one percent Monday. Elsewhere, stock markets mostly climbed after US President Joe Biden said he was considering lifting some trade tariffs imposed on China by predecessor Donald Trump. Tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars of Chinese imports are due to expire in July, and Biden has faced growing calls to get rid of the punitive duties to help combat the highest US inflation in more than four decades.

Biden's comments Monday came during a visit to Tokyo. The president added that while a US recession was not inevitable, he acknowledged the economic pain felt by American consumers over soaring inflation. Ending the tariffs could help cut roaring US inflation by making imports cheaper. Biden also announced that 13 countries had joined a new, US-led Asia-Pacific trade initiative. Investors will be looking to the release on Wednesday of minutes from the last Federal Reserve meeting for clues on the pace of future interest rate hikes by the US central bank. — AFP



COLMAR, Luxembourg: Goodyear's non-pneumatic tire (NPT) project manager, Michael Rachita, poses during the presentation of the NPT tire, an airless tire, of Goodyear in Colmar-Berg, Luxembourg, on May 17, 2022. — AFP

is developing with US car manufacturer General Motors, and which it hopes can make the jump from auto shows to showrooms next year.

Its researchers are working on a cocktail of fiber-glass and resin to hold the rubber onto the honeycomb structure of the new tire. But Michelin's CEO Florent Menegaux doesn't expect airless tires to squeeze out regular tires anytime soon. "We're going to continue to have air tires for several decades," he said. Goodyear, which submitted its first patent on airless tire technology in 1982, has recently put its food down on the accelerator in terms of research and development. The US firm aims to have a maintenance-free and long-lasting airless tire for cars by the end of the decade.

It already has an early version for shuttle buses and automated delivery vehicles on university campuses. Bridgestone also hopes to have an airless tyre ready within a decade, having already tested early versions on utility vehicles. Other manufacturers are more skeptical that airless tires will ever offer comparable shock absorption as traditional tires and the noise can be reduced sufficiently.—AFP

Business

'This is an atrocity': Fears grow that Russian blockade may unleash famine

Large portions of grain and other food products left to rot

ODESSA, Ukraine: Staring out over Ukraine's seemingly endless wheat fields near Odessa, Dmitriy Matulyak has a difficult time imagining that so many people may starve soon as another bountiful harvest nears.

The war has been hard on the 62-year-old farmer. On the first day of invasion, an airstrike hit one of his warehouses, incinerating over 400 tons of animal feed as Russian troops fanned out from their bases in the Crimean Peninsula and seized large chunks of southern Ukraine.

"My voice trembles and tears come to my eyes because of how many people I know that have already died, how many relatives are suffering and how many have gone abroad," he tells AFP.

But worse may still lie ahead. The Russians never stormed the beaches in the nearby port of Odessa as feared, but their ongoing blockade of the Black Sea has been ruinous—unleashing economic devastation in Ukraine and threatening famine elsewhere.

Silos and ports across Ukraine are now brimming with millions of tons of grain with nowhere to go as the country is slowly suffocated by the siege. In Ukraine's balmy south, the summer harvest is set to begin in the coming weeks, but few know where exactly they will put this season's wheat, stirring fears that large portions of the grain and other food products will be left to rot.

"It's savagery for one country to have food spoiling like this and for other people to be left poor and hungry," says Matulyak. "This is an atrocity. It's savagery. There is no other way to put it."

'Malnutrition, mass hunger and famine'

While much of the war's focus remains on the grinding battle of attrition in eastern Ukraine, the Black Sea blockade may trigger the most wide ranging consequences from the conflict yet, with experts issuing increasingly dire warnings about surging food prices and potential famine. Before the Russian invasion,

Ukraine served as one of the world's leading breadbaskets—exporting roughly 4.5 million tons of agricultural produce per month through its ports, including 12 percent of the planet's wheat, 15 percent of its corn, and half of its sunflower oil. The war and its ongoing blockade has largely brought the trade to a halt, with alternative routes by rail and truck unable to tackle the enormous logistical and financial hurdles needed to move so much produce to international markets.

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has been unequivocal on the matter, saying last week that the war "threatens to tip tens of millions of people over the edge into food insecurity".

What might follow would be "malnutrition, mass hunger and famine, in a crisis that could last for years", he warned. To date, over 20 million tons of food products remain stuck in Ukraine, according to Ukrainian authorities. In southern Odessa, the crisis can be felt acutely. The port remains idle with nothing coming in or going out for months now. For generations, the economic might of Eastern Europe's fertile agricultural heartlands were largely marshalled in Odessa, with its sprawling port and rail hub connecting the region's wheat fields to the coast.

That centuries-old link has now been severed. The city's port and warehouses are currently holding more than four million tons of grain, all of which came from the last harvest.

"We won't be able to store this new harvest in any way, that's the problem," says Odessa mayor Gennady Trukhanov. "People will simply die of hunger," he says if the blockade continues.

'Relevant weapons'

Ukraine's economy has also been ravaged as a result, with World Bank estimates predicting the war and crippling naval siege would likely trigger a 45 percent decline in the country's GDP this year.

And while Ukraine's land forces have proven



ODESSA, Ukraine: People work on a sunflowers field at a farm in southern Ukraine's Odessa region on May 22, 2022, on the 88th day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

resilient against a larger, better armed enemy, the Russians continue to enjoy almost complete superiority at sea. "Unfortunately, Ukraine has traditionally overlooked the issue of maritime security," explained the country's former defense minister Andriy Zagorodnyuk in a paper published by the Atlantic Council. "While the democratic world has taken up the challenge of arming Ukraine to resist Russian aggression on land, international involvement in the war at sea has been more limited."

Over the weekend, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on the world to intervene, begging for the "relevant weapons" that could help bring the Russians to heel and end the blockade.

"It will create a food crisis if we do not unblock

the routes for Ukraine, do not help the countries of Africa, Europe, Asia, which need these food products," the president argued. But even if given the needed arms, it could take months or longer to kick-start trade again if the war rages on, with shipping companies unlikely to send their fleets into an active conflict zone. For farmers like Matulyak who were born in the Soviet Union and once enjoyed "brotherly" ties to Russia, the ongoing conflict and its fallout is hard to swallow.

"Of course it would be good if all these issues could be resolved by some diplomatic peaceful means," he says. "But we have already seen that Russia does not understand the normal values people hold." — AFP

Lexus opens brand new boutique at Assima Mall

KUWAIT: Lexus L-finesse design seeks to give physical form to the Lexus experience. It dynamically unites the seemingly contradictory elements of "leading-edge" and "finesse" through the seamless anticipation of customer needs and desires that is central to Lexus's design philosophy. Lexus designed products display "Incisive Simplicity" yet at the same time, "Intriguing Elegance" they are modern and striking yet warm and humanized.

Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons has announced the opening of brand-new Lexus boutique called "L-finesse" located at Assima Mall, architecturally stunning and Kuwait's modern shopping destination in the capital governorate. The opening ceremony was attended by Shunsuke Kitai, Assistant General Manager at Toyota Motor Corporation along with Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer CEO, Mahmoud Abou-Zahr Senior Business Director Lexus Kuwait, Top Management Team, members from Lexus Sales and Service in the presence of representatives from the press and media.

Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer said, "Al-Sayer and Lexus always takes new leaps of excellence, always thrives to enhance, develop and be creative, from its car models and designs to its facilities and of course, the way it provides an amazing experience to all their customers."

Mahmoud Abou-Zahr commented "Lexus is the leading luxury automotive brand in the world, and



especially in Kuwait, by far the most desired luxury automotive brand. Market trends are now changing and Al-Sayer Lexus wants to be where the customers are, not just wait for customers to come to showroom. L-finesse is closer to the customer, to offer a unique experience and of course increase the brand value".

Assima Mall is the newest mall in Kuwait located in the heart of the city and attracts visitors of all age groups. Holding many of the long-awaited "firsts in Kuwait" such as National Geographic Ultimate Explorer Experience, UFC Gym as well as new supermarket brand. Yet another interesting feature of the mall is the top level without retail outlets exclusively for sports enthusiast to exercise at the convenience of indoor environment. In addition to shopping, Mall Assima project also includes a business tower and a 5-star hotel which are coming soon.

According to Bedour Faisal Al-Sayer, Manager Advertising and Promotion "L-finesse is a unique

concept store not a regular showroom. An impressive location where visitors can explore about Lexus brand and products. We are providing a modern experience powered by the touch of advanced technology. L-finesse promises the ultimate luxury experience right from the moment our customer steps in and through the various touch points at the store".

Omotenashi - Japanese hospitality

Customers at L-finesse will be welcomed by our receptionist and guide them in every step through their journey with the service of wide range of beverages. Some of the exceptional features of L-finesse include an official accessories and merchandise display, two brand advisors offices for one-on-one interaction to explore about latest Lexus models even offering the customers a convenient opportunity to execute a sales transaction if the customer wishes to purchase a Lexus.



Powered by advanced technology

Customers will notice the display of 2 digital screens whilst passing by L-finesse. The concept store also features a large horizontal video wall displaying videos with the true Lexus spirit. Furthermore, there are two interactive screens for our customers to explore the Lexus brand and its heritage. L-finesse is also equipped with 2 VR (Virtual Reality) units where customers are introduced to Lexus vehicles driven by the exciting VR experience supported by the motion sensors and the VR headset. Such advanced technology enables them to interact with the selected vehicles, change colors, turn around, get inside, play product video, and much more. Lexus aims to consistently provide the highest levels of Customer Satisfaction thus matching the superior level of Lexus quality standards. This latest endeavor is part of the continuous commitment by Al-Sayer of further reinforcing Lexus brand's strong market presence.

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

Qatar's growth to accelerate in 2022 on robust private sector activity

KUWAIT: Qatar's economy returned to growth in 2021, with GDP up 1.5 percent, on stronger consumer demand and lessening COVID-19 disruptions. The swift recovery was underpinned by government support measures (a \$21 billion stimulus package followed by a rapid vaccination rollout) and higher energy prices. Growth is expected to accelerate to 3.7 percent in 2022 as the non-oil sector expands 5.5 percent amid a boost to the travel, hospitality, logistics and business support sectors from the FIFA World Cup. The event could attract around 1.5 million visitors in November-December, equivalent to 50 percent of the country's population of almost three million.

Improved private sector activity was evident in the purchasing managers' index survey reading for April, which

reached an all-time high of 63.6 led by reportedly strong conditions in the construction sector and rising work backlogs. Robust and broad-based credit growth of 11 percent in 2021 also points to an expanding private sector, while activity in the real estate market has shown signs of recovery after several years of decline: the Qatar Central Bank's (QCB) real estate price index gained 2.6 percent y/y in March 2022.

Underpinning the medium-term outlook for the non-oil economy is the government's ambitious Vision 2030 program of large infrastructure investments in strategic sectors such as manufacturing, finance, and tourism. While some \$30 billion in natural gas-related projects are planned, we do not expect to see major output gains until the first phase of the North Field gas expansion

project is complete in 2026, which should deliver a 43 percent increase in LNG volumes to 110 mtpa and bolster Qatar's position as the leading global LNG exporter.

Inflation up

Pandemic-linked supply chain disruptions and surging global commodity prices are spilling over into domestic prices. CPI inflation hit a 13-year high of 6.5 percent in December before easing to 4.4 percent in March. Price rises in the foods, transport, and recreation sectors provided the main inflationary impulse, but housing and utility prices also increased in February and March after a prolonged period of deflation. We expect inflation to average 3.5 percent in 2022, up from 2.3 percent in 2021. The QCB, following the US Fed's lead, has raised its overnight repo rate twice this year by a total of 75 bps to 1.75 percent and its key lending rate by 25 bps to 2.75 percent. Persistently high inflation would likely justify further tightening in 2022, and we expect the QCB to move mostly in parallel with the US Fed.

Higher hydrocarbon receipts

Higher energy prices should see the budget surplus widen to 12.8 percent of GDP this year from 0.2 percent of GDP in 2021. The Ministry of Finance announced a moderately expansionary budget for FY22/23, raising spending by 5 percent on higher capital and current expenditure outlays compared to the previous budget, as it looks to strike a balance between greater fiscal restraint going forward and supporting economic growth and development objectives. Realized revenues are likely to be substantially higher than budget approximations, which are based on a conservative oil price of \$55/bbl. The economic recovery would allow the government to unwind the remainder of its COVID support measures, including the blanket loan moratorium. Furthermore, it is possible that VAT could be implemented in 2023, supporting public revenues further, though the timeline remains uncertain.

Public debt

Previously strong debt issuance (\$18.6 billion in bonds and sukuk in 2021) could moderate in 2022 with lit-

tle need for deficit financing and amid a rising interest rate environment. However, Qatar will still likely make sizeable debt issuances over the medium term to finance its gas expansion plans. A solid economic growth outlook, coupled with higher hydrocarbon receipts, should see the public debt ratio ease over the medium term. Gross central government debt (excluding GREs) is expected to fall to 47 percent of GDP in 2022 from 55 percent in 2021. Qatar's credit standing remains robust (AA- by Fitch), backed by large external reserves and a good track record of effective policy-making.

Downside risks to the outlook largely center on energy market volatility, further COVID-19 outbreaks and tighter global financial conditions. The risk of a global downturn amid aggressive Fed policy tightening could weaken the energy demand outlook. Regional geopolitical tensions could also spike should a new nuclear agreement with Iran fail to materialize. Finally, a World Cup that disappoints in terms of turnout and economic contribution could dent investor confidence.

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These pictures show Cantor's giant softshell turtle hatchlings before they are released into the wild along the Mekong river in Sambour district of Kratie province. — AFP photos

Hundreds of endangered baby giant turtles released into Cambodian river

Hundreds of critically endangered baby giant turtles were released into Cambodia's Mekong River to mark World Turtle Day on Monday. Cantor's giant softshell turtles have all but vanished across their former territory in Vietnam and Thailand thanks to poaching and illegal trade, and were only rediscovered in the Southeast Asian country in 2007. The Wildlife Conservation Society coordinated the release of 580 hatchlings, which can grow to a length of up to 200cm (78 inches) and mainly live buried in the sand and the water, surfacing only twice a day to breathe.

Monks blessed the baby reptiles-also known as "frog-faced turtles" for their distinctive appearance-before helping conservationists and eager children send the stout-nosed snappers into the Mekong's muddy waters. The creatures are among a batch of 982 turtles rescued as eggs-to protect them from the dangers which threaten the species' numbers-carefully incubated, hatched, and then released. Ken Sereyrotha, country program director for WCS Cambodia, said significant progress had been made in protecting the animal in the country but more work was needed.

"This species is being threatened by illegal hunting and trafficking," he said. The WCS and Cambodia's department of fisheries conservation of fisheries administration has found and rescued more than 2,000 eggs this year-with the teams

hopeful the remainder will eventually hatch. Ouk Vibol, director of the fisheries department, urged local stakeholders to continue the conversation work, and promised that "those who still trade protected species will face legal action." Last year, the teams managed to nurture and then release around 1,300 hatchlings into the wild. — AFP



This picture shows people watching as others release Cantor's giant softshell turtle hatchlings into the wild along the Mekong river in Sambour district of Kratie province.



(From left) New Zealander actor Matthew Sunderland, Australian actor Jada Alberts, British actor Sean Harris, Australian director Thomas M Wright, actor Cormac Wright, Australian actor Joel Edgerton, Australian actor Steve Mouzakis, British film producer Iain Canning and Film producer Kim Hodgert attend a photocall for the film "The Stranger" at the 75th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes. — AFP photos

'Undeniably unsettling' Aussie cop drama disturbs Cannes

In two of the most intense performances to grip the Cannes Film Festival, award-winning actors Joel Edgerton and Sean Harris face off in a dark undercover cop story from Australia. "The Stranger" is based on the real-life effort to ensnare a child murderer that takes a terrible toll on the officers charged with ingratiating themselves with the suspect.

Edgerton, known from films such as "Loving", "The Great Gatsby" and TV series "The Underground Railroad", praised the officers who risked their lives and psychological well-being in the case. "These are all people that we'll never get to meet. I don't even know the real name of the person I'm playing," he told AFP. "That job has such a weight and takes such a toll," he said.

His target is played by Sean Harris, who has established himself as one of the most visceral presences in cinema-from the bad guy in the most recent "Mission: Impossible" films to a ruthless killer in "The Borgias" and his BAFTA-winning role in British series "Southcliffe". Edgerton praised his ability to balance vulnerability with menace.

"There's something about Sean... there's a vibration that's undeniably unsettling and terrifying and that's a rare gift," he said. Harris credited his year-long preparation for the role for his blistering performance. "When I got over to Australia, that's when it started to kick in, the intensity-you turn up the dial. All the work I'd done started to flow through me," he told AFP.

'A schizophrenic experience'
Director Thomas M Wright, also known as an actor in TV series "Top of the Lake", said it was a strange experience presenting such a dark piece of work amid the sunshine and paparazzi of Cannes. "It's almost a schizophrenic experience," he

said. "You've gone to this incredibly personal place to make this, it's difficult subject matter, it's left a mark on us."

"And then we're at Cannes, which is like a film you've been watching your whole life and suddenly you're in the middle of it." Edgerton said it was particularly tricky given that the undercover officers must remain anonymous. "We get to celebrate ourselves by making a fictional version of a story. These guys will never be celebrated," he said.

"The Stranger", which is playing in the festival's Un Certain Regard section, received a long standing ovation at its premiere on Friday, with critics singling out the central performances. Wright said he separated Edgerton and Harris-who knew each other from previous films "The King" and "The Green Knight"-during filming.

"They were kept completely separate," Wright said. "I wanted them to conduct their research entirely separately. "We can't actually talk about what that research entailed. We certainly went to some very deep places with the making of this film. It wasn't a film we just walked away from at the end," he added. Australia has a history of bleak but brilliantly-made true-crime dramas, from "The Snowtown Murders" and "Nitram", to "Animal Kingdom" which also starred Edgerton. "We're in a landscape that was formed through violence and defined by violence. We can't see it, we don't understand it," said Wright. "You look at the great Australian artists... there's a darkness there. We're surrounded by an image of sunshine and beaches but it's a complex country." — AFP



(From left) Australian actor Joel Edgerton, Australian director Thomas M. Wright and British actor Sean Harris pose during a photocall for the film "The Stranger".

'Men' brings blood-soaked toxic masculinity to Cannes

Rising star Jessie Buckley admits she is no horror film junkie, but was happy to take on the wild, gore-splattered "Men" thanks to its provocative look at issues around toxic masculinity. "Men", which follows Buckley's Oscar-nominated turn in Netflix hit "The Lost Daughter", is the latest from British director Alex Garland. His back catalogue includes inventive sci-fi dramas such as "Ex Machina", "Annihilation" and "Devs", as well as writing credits on "The Beach" and "28 Days Later".

But his new film, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on Sunday, may be his strangest concoction yet. It sees Buckley trapped in a remote English village, trying to recover from a traumatic relationship only to find herself under siege from several extremely creepy guys-all played by British actor Rory Kinnear. This was not Buckley's comfort zone.

"I'm very squeamish. The last horror film I saw was 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre' when I was about 10 and that was it for me," the 32-year-old told AFP in Cannes. "It wasn't so much the film, it was the fact that it was a Halloween party and my dad stopped the film midway and drove us all out to the woods. We were terrified!" she said, laughing.

Garland's film, however, uses horror film tropes in an innovative way to talk about emotional manipulation, male violence and challenges to the patriarchy. "Alex provoked some very blunt, honest questions that we could investigate together," Buckley said. "He's an intelligent and provocative film-maker and I felt safe exploring this with him."

'Very messy'
Kinnear faced a special acting challenge, having to play a wide variety of strange characters. But nothing could prepare him for the final sequence which-without giving away any spoilers-is one of

the strangest and goriest conclusions ever put on screen. "The last week of filming was very messy," Kinnear told AFP. "There was lots of squashed banana and fake blood," added a delighted Buckley.

Garland tried to keep the actor sweet as the demands of the scene became increasingly disgusting with goodies, Kinnear said. "I tried to hide my discomfort-I didn't want to be a moaner. "But the treats I was being offered were getting more and more elaborate and delicious, and every time I was offered another chocolate-covered fancy, I knew it was just a lump of guilt that was being handed to me."



British director Alex Garland poses during a photocall as part of the 22nd edition of the Gerardmer Fantastic Film festival, in Gerardmer. — AFP

Filming sounds almost as memorable as the insane imagery that was produced. "There was a lot of being outdoors and baying at the moon. I woke up the local livestock," Kinnear said.

"It's true," said Buckley, jumping in. "At one point the sheep started responding. You can hear them in the film if you listen carefully." Kinnear is a celebrated theatre actor, also known for supporting roles in recent James Bond films and shows like "Penny Dreadful". Buckley is considered one of the most exciting new talents in cinema.

Her breakout role as a fiery, working-class single mother in 2018's "Wild Rose" earned her a BAFTA nomination and her Oscar-nominated role in "The Lost Daughter" means she is now highly in demand. She also won an Olivier Award last month after starring in a West End revival of "Cabaret" in London in 2021. Her character in "Men", Harper, "is someone who was always going to choose life," she said. "Even if that meant facing the most fearful things," she added. — AFP



(From left) In this image Paapa Essiedu, Gayle Rankin, Rory Kinnear and Jessie Buckley pose during IMDb exclusive portrait session at Alamo Drafthouse in Brooklyn City. — AFP

RISING STAR OF AFRICAN ART HITS ON COLONIALISM, TYRANNY AND BEAUTY OF BLACK



Contemporary Senegalese artist, Omar Ba, paints onto a black canvas at his workshop in Sangalkam. —AFP photos



Contemporary Senegalese artist, Omar Ba, paints onto a black canvas at his workshop.



Contemporary Senegalese artist, Omar Ba, paints onto a black canvas at his workshop.



Contemporary Senegalese artist, Omar Ba, carries paint through his workshop.

In a serene studio filled with birdsong, Omar Ba takes off his shoes and gets down on his hands and knees. Then the renowned Senegalese artist begins to paint a five-meter-long canvas a deep, dark shade of black. This is how Ba, a rising star in the world of contemporary African art, starts most of his works, which question the state of the world and Africa's place in it.

"On black backgrounds, I feel that the drawing will be much more readable and clear for me," he said from his airy workspace at the end of a pathway strewn with shells from the nearby Lac Rose. "I feel in perfect union with what I am doing because I find myself in front of this color, which I find noble and magnificent." Ba, 45, is a top sensation at the 14th Dakar Biennale, which opened Thursday. His work touches on colonialism, violence, but also hope. "We see the color white as the neutral color, the pure color, the innocent color," he said. "Black is always associated with what is dirty, what is dark ... and that can affect the person who lives these clichés."

Enigmatic, hallucinatory, poetic

Ba has 20 pieces currently on display at the

Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, and an exhibition opening in New York in September. In November, the Baltimore Museum of Art will host a retrospective of his work. Enigmatic, even hallucinatory, and intensely poetic, his work is inhabited by dream-like visions with shimmering colors and hybrid creatures with the head of a goat, a ram or Horus, the falcon-headed Egyptian deity.

His creatures embody the traumas inherited from colonialism, tyranny, violence, North-South inequalities. "These characters are half-man, half-animal," he said. "It is a nod to the natural within the human being, who I think behaves like an animal in the jungle—we try to dominate others to be able to exist." In his 2021 "Anomalies" exhibition in Brussels, Ba painted imaginary heads of state with their hands resting on a book symbolizing a constitution, a way to castigate the slew of African leaders who have recently modified constitutions in order to stay in power.

"We see that Africa wants to go elsewhere, wants to move," he said. "There are wars, overthrown heads of state, dictatorships ... the African artist should not remain indifferent to what happens in this continent—we must try to see what we can do

to build, pacify and give hope." Currently, Ba says he is focused on solutions, a theme apparent in his biennale exhibit.

One of his festival pieces features two figures with trophies for necks standing on an enormous globe and shaking hands. They are surrounded by laurel branches, symbolizing peace. "It speaks of reconciliation, unity and an Africa that wins—not an Africa that always asks or begs, but an Africa that participates in the concert of nations," he said. The biennale, hosted in his home country for more than three decades, holds special significance for Ba. It was in Dakar where, after abandoning training to be a mechanic, he switched to art studies.

Painting 'reinvented'

Since his first exhibition in Switzerland in 2010, Ba, who now lives between Senegal, Brussels and Geneva, has also exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. For the past few years, he has worked from the peace and quiet of his Bambilor studio, in the middle of a mango plantation, an hour's drive from Dakar, sharing the land with cows, ducks and exotic flowers. "Omar Ba has reinvented painting," said Malick Ndiaye, the biennale's artistic director.

"It is an innovative and powerful work that we are not used to seeing in terms of the technique he uses, the materials he uses and the composition and arrangement." Highly sought-after by collectors, Ba is represented by the Templon Gallery, which has previously exhibited Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cesar and Andy Warhol. "His work is much more complex than most things you see—his treatment of subject matter, his use of bestiary and colour are strikingly strong and beautiful," said gallerist Mathieu Templon.

"He is one of the African artists with the most aesthetic and political work." Ba's work has featured in the Louvre Abu Dhabi's permanent collection and the Louis Vuitton Foundation for the Contemporary Art's collection. Speaking ahead of the biennale, the continent's largest contemporary art event, Ba said he was pleased to see young African artists "beginning to enter very large galleries and exhibit in museums that are recognized internationally." "We must try to make Africa an essential place for art," he said. —AFP



James Fitton (left) and Volker Waldmann are dressed in the yellow uniform of detainees as they arrive at a courthouse in the Iraqi capital Baghdad. —AFP

IRAQ TRIAL OF BRITON AND GERMAN FOR ANTIQUITY THEFT ADJOURNED

An Iraqi court on Sunday adjourned for two weeks the trial of a Briton and a German man accused of trying to smuggle antiquities after a defense lawyer called for more investigations. James Fitton, 66, a retired British geologist, and Volker Waldmann, 60, a Berlin psychologist, have been in custody since they were arrested on March 20 at Baghdad airport as they wound up their holiday.

According to statements from customs officers and witnesses, Fitton's baggage contained 10 stone fragments, pieces of pottery or ceramics. Waldmann allegedly had two pieces, but denied they were his. The two men did not know each other before they travelled to Iraq on an organized tour, and both say they had no intention of breaking the law. The trial was adjourned until June 6 to allow time for further investigations, at the request of Waldmann's defense lawyer, Furat Kuba.

During initial investigations, "certain important aspects were not examined", Kuba said, citing the report of an expert committee that said the fragments found with the men were antiquities. "We don't have any more details: what site do these pieces come from? What era, what civilization do they date back to?" Kuba asked, adding there were also outstanding questions relating to the site where

the fragments were collected.

"Is it fenced and protected?" Kuba asked. "Are there signs indicating that these are ancient pieces that it is forbidden to collect?" Kuba said he wanted the tour guide or an Iraqi official who had been present at the site to give evidence in court as to whether the tourists had received instructions prohibiting them from picking up fragments. Their trial comes with the war-ravaged country, whose tourism infrastructure is almost non-existent, timidly opening to visitors.

Iraq has also been trying to recover antiquities that were looted over a period of decades from the country whose civilization dates back thousands of years. The judge told the accused they were charged under a 2002 law which provides for sentences up to the death penalty for those guilty of "intentionally taking or trying to take out of Iraq an antiquity".

Fitton, at the start of the trial, when asked why he tried to take the artefacts out of Iraq, cited his "hobby", saying he was interested in "geology and ancient history and archeology," and was not aware that taking the fragments was illegal. Waldmann has denied the pieces allegedly found in his luggage were his, but they belonged to Fitton. —AFP

BEAR CUBS RESCUED FROM WILDLIFE TRADE IN VIETNAM

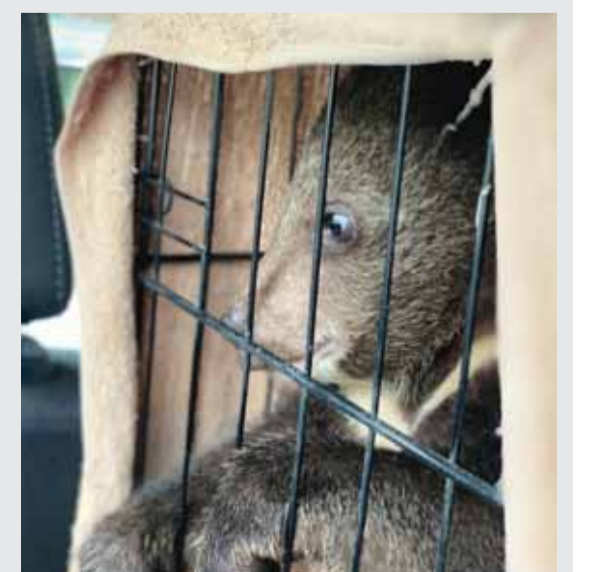
Two bear cubs are starting a new life in a sanctuary in Vietnam after being rescued from the illegal wildlife trade, an animal welfare group said. The two sisters, named Be and Em, were confiscated by authorities from a man who admitted catching them in a cardamom field with a plan to sell them, the Four Paws organization said. Communist Vietnam is a major hub for the illegal trade in wild animals, and bears are kept to drain the bile from their

gall bladders for use in traditional medicine.

The rescued cubs have been taken to a sanctuary in Vietnam run by Four Paws, where they will be reared and spend the rest of their lives. They cannot be returned to nature because there are no safe places for bears in Vietnam and no projects to reintroduce them to the wild.

"At the moment they mostly eat, play, and sleep but we can already see their individual personalities showing," Emily

Lloyd, Animal Manager at the sanctuary, said in the Four Paws statement. "Be is very playful and confident, while Em for now is more reserved but nonetheless curious." Four Paws said the sanctuary has hand-raised five bears rescued from similar circumstances in recent years. Vietnam has passed laws to try to curb the wildlife trade but enforcement is patchy and Four Paws said the bear bile business was "flourishing". —AFP



These handout photos from international animal charity Four Paws show Asiatic black bear cub being cared for by the charity in Tam Duong district in northwest Vietnam. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

PARIS STREET ART LEGEND MISS.TIC DIES AGED 66



This file photo shows French artist Miss.Tic posing in her studio in Paris. —AFP photos



This file photo shows French artist Miss. Tic attending a roundtable meeting in Saint-Malo, during the 22nd edition of the literature festival 'Etonnants Voyageurs'.

Miss.Tic, whose provocative work began cropping up in the Montmartre neighborhood of Paris in the mid-80s and made her a pioneer of French street art, died on Sunday aged 66, her family told AFP. Radhia Novat grew up in the narrow streets in the shadow of Sacre-Coeur basilica, the daughter of a Tunisian father and a mother from Normandy in western France, where she began stenciling sly and emancipatory slogans. Her family said she had died of an unspecified illness. Other French street artists paid tribute to her work.

On Twitter, street artist Christian Guemy, alias C215, hailed "one of the founders of stencil art". The walls of the 13th arrondissement of Paris - where her images are a common sight - "will never be the same again", he wrote. Another colleague, "Jef Aerosol" said she had fought her final illness with courage, in a tribute posted on Instagram. And France's newly appointed Culture Minister, Rima Abdul Malak, saluted her "iconic, resolutely feminist" work.

Miss.Tic's work often included clever wordplays-almost always lost in translation-and a heroine with flowing black hair who resembled the artist herself. The images became fixtures on



This file photo shows French artist Miss.Tic posing in her studio in Paris.

walls across the capital. "I had a background in street theatre, and I liked this idea of street art," Miss.Tic said in a 2011 interview. "At first I thought, 'I'm going to write poems'. And then, 'we need images' with these poems. I started with self-portraits and then turned towards other women," she said.

Miss.Tic also drew the attention of law enforcement over complaints of defacing public property, leading to an arrest in 1997. But her works came to be shown in galleries in France and abroad, with some acquired by the Paris modern art fund of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, according to her website. And cinema buffs will recognize her work on the poster for Claude Chabrol's 2007 film "La fille coupee en deux" ("A Girl Cut in Two").

For a spell she was a favorite of fashion brands such as Kenzo and Louis Vuitton. "So often it's not understood that you can be young and beautiful and have things to say," she told AFP in 2011. "But it's true that they sell us what they want with beautiful women. So I thought, I'm going to use these women to sell them poetry." Her funeral, the date of which is still to be announced, will be open to the public, said her family. —AFP



A picture shows Ak Khan, an Akhal-Teke breed steed, taking part in a parade marking the 27th anniversary of Turkmenistan's independence in central Ashgabat. —AFP photos

TURKMEN EX-RULER'S FAVORITE HORSE TO GET STATUE

Long treated as a national celebrity, the favorite horse of Turkmenistan's former president is to be immortalized with a personal statue in the gas-rich Central Asian country. The Akhal-Teke breed of horse enjoys a prominent role in government propaganda in the former Soviet nation and Ak Khan-whose name means White Khan-was the prized stallion of Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who stepped down in March after 16

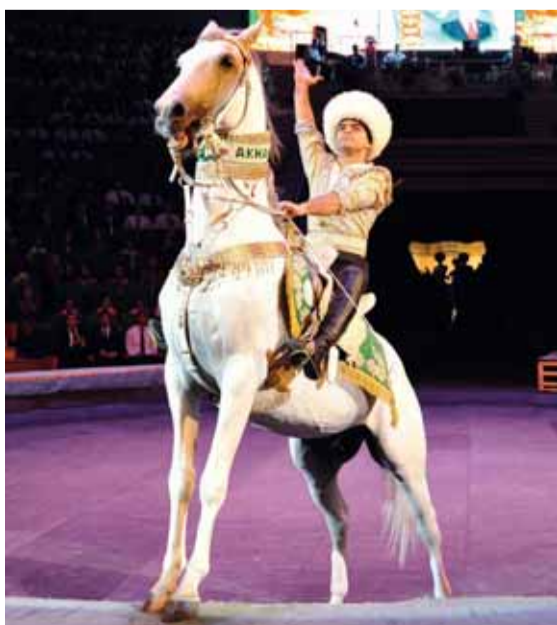
years in power.

On Monday, state newspaper Neutral Turkmenistan reported that Berdimukhamedov's son and successor, Serdar Berdimukhamedov, had approved the monument in the province of Akhal outside the capital Ashgabat. The monument will "increase the glory of the Akhal-Teke horses-the national pride of the Turkmen people," the paper cited a presidential decree as saying.

Berdymukhamedov, 64, stepped down stating a desire to allow "younger leaders" to govern. His only son subsequently won a snap election in March, beating token rival candidates. The former president is known by state media as Turkmenistan's "protector" and remains head of the upper house of parliament. In 2015, a golden monument portraying Berdimukhamedov atop Ak Khan, a dove on his wrist, was unveiled in the capital as a leadership cult intensified around the then-head of state. Berdimukhamedov took power in 2006 after the sudden death of autocrat Saparmurat Niyazov, whom he served first as his personal dentist and later as health minister.

In 2018, Ak Khan, whom Berdimukhamedov claims to have reared personally, won a Guinness World Record for walking 10 meters in 4.19 seconds on his hind legs. In 2017, he bore a rider who lit the flame of the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games-a relatively obscure sports competition backed by the Olympic Council of Asia. Turkmenistan hosted the games with much pomp, ignoring demands from international rights groups to investigate allegations that residential homes were bulldozed as part of preparations for the tournament.

In March 2021, the then president was shown visiting the stables where Ak Khan's foal was born. The strongman named him "Ashgabat" and wrote a song for the foal. A month later, Serdar replaced his father as chairman of the national horse association-a symbolic switch seen as paving the way for Central Asia's first dynastic succession. —AFP



In this file photo taken on June 29, 2018 a circus rider sits atop Ak Khan, an Akhal-Teke breed steed, at a circus arena in Ashgabat.

LIBYAN, 31, WINS TOP ARABIC FICTION PRIZE WITH DEBUT NOVEL

Libyan author Mohamed Alnaas became the youngest winner of the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction with his debut novel "Bread on Uncle Milad's Table" on Sunday. Alnaas, 31, will receive \$50,000 and funds will also be provided to translate his book into English, organizers said on their website. The prize, along with a further \$50,000 divided between five other shortlisted novelists, is publicly funded by Abu Dhabi, one of seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates. Published by Rashm, with support from the Libyan Arete Foundation, the winning novel explores gender roles in the male-dominated closed society of a Libyan village.

It recounts the story of Milad, who strives to live up to the definition of ideal masculinity but is deemed to have failed as "a man" after taking on a home role typically reserved for women while his partner, Zeinab, works and supports the family. Born in 1991, Alnaas published a short story collection, "Blue Blood", in 2020, but "Bread on Uncle Milad's Table" is his first novel.

He is the first Libyan author and youngest writer to win the prize, which was launched in 2007. The novel "offers a deep and meticulous critique of prevailing concepts of masculinity and femininity and the division



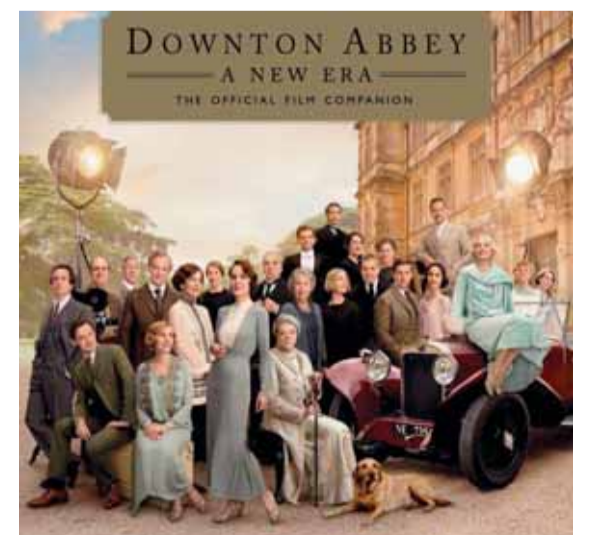
of work between men and women, and the effect of these on both a psychological and social level", said Shukri Mabkhout, chair of the prize's panel of judges. "It falls into the category of novels which question cultural norms about gender." Alnaas' novel was chosen from a shortlist of six.

The five other short-listed authors, from Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman and the United Arab Emirates, will each receive \$10,000, the organizers said. Oil-rich Abu Dhabi, the richest of the UAE's seven emirates, has taken steps to become a cultural hub including hosting the Louvre Abu Dhabi museum. —AFP

'Strange' reigns but 'Downton' shows class on N America screens

"Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" continued its domination in North American theaters this weekend, earning an estimated \$31.6 million, while the latest "Downton Abbey" came in a stately second, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Sunday. Marvel and Disney's "Strange," again starring the versatile Benedict Cumberbatch, has been a COVID-era star since its release three weekends ago. It has now earned \$342 million domestically and \$461 million abroad for a global total of \$803 million. "Downton Abbey: A New Era" from Focus Features took in a solid \$16 million. Perhaps not surprising given the huge popularity of the British TV series that inspired it, but nonetheless a sign that older moviegoers-the most reluctant to return to pandemic-era theaters-are beginning to do so. "This is a very good opening," said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research, who noted that nearly half of ticket buyers were aged 55 or older.

Writer/director Julian Fellowes, Gross said, "is the George Lucas of period English sitting-room drama." Most of the original Downton cast-led by Maggie Smith, Hugh Bonneville, Elizabeth McGovern and Michelle Dockery-appear in the sequel, which critics have called an "affectionate group hug." In third place for the Friday-through-Sunday period was Universal's animated action comedy "The Bad Guys." The DreamWorks Animation production, with a voice cast led by Sam Rockwell, Awkwafina and Anthony Ramos, took in \$6.1 million. Paramount's family-friendly "Sonic the Hedgehog 2" slipped one spot from last weekend to fourth, at \$3.9 million. In fifth was A24's new horror film "Men," at \$3.3 million. Directed by Alex Garland, who made "Ex Machina," and starring Jessie Buckley, it drew a rare low D+ grade from the CinemaScore site.



Meanwhile a pro-Donald Trump film, "2000 Mules," earned \$765,000 to claim 11th spot. The movie from conservative Dinesh D'Souza-who in 2018 received a pardon from Trump for a felony conviction of making illegal campaign contributions-falsely claims to offer "smoking gun" evidence of massive voter fraud in the 2020 election.

Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Everything Everywhere All at Once" (\$3.1 million)
- "Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore" (\$1.9 million)
- "Firestarter" (\$1.9 million)
- "The Lost City" (\$1.5 million)

Sports

Thomas comeback seals PGA victory as Pereira collapse

Zalatoris settles for his fifth top-10 finish

TULSA: Justin Thomas matched the greatest last-day comeback in PGA Championship history on Sunday, roaring back from seven strokes down at Southern Hills to capture his second major title. The 29-year-old American defeated compatriot Will Zalatoris by one stroke in a tension-packed three-hole aggregate playoff after a heartbreaking 72nd-hole collapse by Chile's Mito Pereira. Pereira led all day only to hit his final tee shot into water and launch a double-bogey disaster at the 18th hole and hand Thomas the trophy. "It was a bizarre day," Thomas said. "I was asked earlier in the week about what lead is safe, and I said, no lead. This place is so tough.

"But if you hit the fairways you can make birdies and I stayed so patient. I just couldn't believe I found myself in a playoff." Not since John Mahaffey's seven-shot rally at Oakmont in 1978 had anyone made such a fightback to win the PGA Championship. Thomas, who also won the 2017 PGA title, fired a three-under-par 67 in Sunday's final round and Zalatoris, last year's Masters runner-up, shot 71 to finish 72 holes deadlocked on five-under 275.

Zalatoris and Thomas each birdied the par-5 13th to open the playoff. At the par-4 17th, Thomas drove the green and two-putted for birdie from 36 feet while Zalatoris chipped to seven feet but missed his birdie bid. At the 18th hole, Zalatoris missed a 40-foot birdie try and finished on one-under while Thomas two-putted from 26 feet, tapping in for par and the victory on two-under. "We just tried to play the golf course for what it is, and this place is so tough," Thomas said.

Zalatoris settled for his fifth top-10 finish in eight

major starts and a sense he's near a breakthrough. "I can do it. I'm pretty close," said Zalatoris. "I battled like crazy today. I'm close and super motivated. We'll get one soon." Pereira shot 75 to share third with American Cameron Young on 276. "It's really sad to not be in the playoff," Pereira said. "I wasn't even thinking about the water. I just wanted to put it in play and I hit it too far right. I guess you have so much pressure in your body you don't even know what you're doing."

The fate of Pereira, who missed the 2019 US Open cut in his only prior major, recalled the epic watery last-hole collapse of Frenchman Jean Van de Velde to lose the 1999 British Open. "I was really nervous," Pereira said. "I tried to handle it a little bit, but it was really tough. Sad to hit it in the water. I wish I could do it again." The 27-year-old from Santiago twice squandered three-stroke leads before throwing away his chance at the last.

"He'll be able to learn from it and be better from it," Thomas said. "He played unbelievable golf this week. There's no reason to hang his head." Thomas had issues as well, shanking a tee shot at the par-3 six but making a 19-foot bogey putt. "It was the best bogey I've ever made in my life, that's for sure," Thomas said. While Pereira struggled, Thomas went on a birdie binge starting with a 12-foot putt to close the front nine. Thomas holed out from 64 feet at the par-3 11th, sank a birdie putt from just inside 18 feet at 12 and blasted out of a bunker to inside four feet of the cup at 17.

Spieth, Rahm well back

England's Tommy Fleetwood, who had runs of four bogeys and four birdies in a row, shared fifth



TULSA: Justin Thomas of the USA celebrates with the Wanamaker Trophy after the final round of the PGA Championship at Southern Hills Country Club on May 22, 2022. —AFP

on 277 with countryman Matthew Fitzpatrick and American Chris Kirk. Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy, who began nine off the pace, made four birdies in the first five holes but never sank another and settled for 68 to finish eighth on 278. Three-time major champion Jordan Spieth, who could have

completed a career Grand Slam with a triumph, fired a 69 to finish on 284. Second-ranked Jon Rahm, the reigning US Open champion from Spain, would have overtaken Masters winner Scottie Scheffler for the world number one ranking with a victory. He shot 68 to finish on 286. —AFP

'King' Kohli to 'Baby AB': Hits and misses of 2022 IPL season

NEW DELHI: The high-octane Indian Premier League moves into the playoffs this week with four teams left to battle for the glitzy Twenty20 championship and the winners to be crowned in Sunday's final. Gujarat Titans, Rajasthan Royals, Lucknow Super Giants and Royal Challengers Bangalore are all that remain standing from the 10 teams who embarked on a marathon season of 70 matches two months ago. Ahead of Tuesday's first playoff match when Gujarat Titans face Rajasthan Royals in Kolkata, AFP Sport highlights five players who grabbed the headlines this season in the world's most valuable cricket tournament:

Virat Kohli (Royal Challengers Bangalore)

The superstar's batting slump has been a constant talking point during the season as Kohli suffered three uncharacteristic 'golden ducks'-out on the first ball of his innings. But 'King' Kohli bounced back just in time for his team's final league game with a match-winning 73 off 54 balls that helped the team make the top four. Kohli, 33, has endured a torrid 12 months that saw him replaced as Indian captain, give up the Bangalore armband and fail to score a century in more than 100 matches in all formats. Now he and Bangalore stand just three wins from a maiden IPL title and play Lucknow in an eliminator on Wednesday. "I'm actually in the happiest phase of my life. I am not finding any self-worth or value in what I do in the field. I'm way past that phase. This is a phase of evolution for me," Kohli said.

Jos Buttler (Rajasthan Royals)

The England batsman has bossed this IPL with three centuries to help Rajasthan finish second in the table, awaiting table-toppers Gujarat in the first qualifier on Tuesday. Buttler has been a smiling assassin, stroking 629 runs in 14 matches—the most of any player—while smashing 37 sixes at a strike-rate of 146.96. Buttler has received praise from his rivals with Kolkata Knight Riders skipper Shreyas Iyer hailing the skill of the Englishman after he scored 103 against his team last month. "The way he manoeuvres the ball, he is a classy batsman," said Shreyas.

Umran Malik (Sunrisers Hyderabad)

The young speedster took the IPL by storm and on Sunday earned his maiden India call-up for the Twenty20 series against South Africa. The 22-year-old Malik, from the Jammu region of Indian-administered Kashmir, bowled the fastest ball of the tournament at 156.9 kph (97.5 mph) and took 22 wickets in 14 matches.

His thunderbolts won rave reviews from international cricketers, including Hyderabad's bowling coach Dale Steyn who said he was "blown away" by the youngster's pace.

Rashid Khan (Gujarat Titans)

Rashid was the key to his team starting with a bang as they remarkably topped the table in their debut season. The Afghanistan wizard not only bamboozled the batsman with his leg-spin bowling but also provided some explosive batting as he displayed his all-round talent. He scored a whirlwind unbeaten 31, including two sixes from the last two balls, to pull off a stunning chase against Hyderabad. And his four wickets against Lucknow helped Gujarat become the first team to book a play-off spot. Former England batsman Kevin Pietersen said Rashid "delivers whenever the captain looks at him."

Dewald Brevis (Mumbai Indians)

The uncapped South African batsman made his presence felt with knocks to remember for wooden-spooners Mumbai Indians. The 19-year-old scored 161 runs in seven matches for five-time champions Mumbai who brought the U19 World Cup star for \$389,610. He capped off the IPL with a crucial 37 off 33 balls in Mumbai's win over Delhi and credited South African great AB de Villiers for his success. "He is such a great human being... and he is really one of the best," said Brevis. "Having him as a mentor is special to me," added the youngster who has been nicknamed "Baby AB" for his ability to hit innovative big shots like his older compatriot. —AFP

Marriage proposals to 'Magician': 5 SEA Games moments

HANOI: The 31st SEA Games in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi close later Monday after nearly two weeks of records, adulation and marriage proposals. AFP Sport picks out five memorable moments:

Rock-star treatment

Efren Reyes of the Philippines was given the kind of reception usually more associated with rock stars than ageing pool players. With more than 100 professional titles to his name in a career spanning over four decades, the 67-year-old was mobbed by young fans eager to get a closer look and a selfie whenever their hero showed up. Despite bowing out early from one event, hundreds of fans still chased the veteran player known as the 'Magician' as he left the building under a heavy security escort. "I love you!" they shouted as he waved regally from a bus. He left the Games with one bronze.

Faster than Bolt

Thai teenager Puripol Boonson blitzed the field in the men's 100m and 200m to underline his status as a possible global sprint star of the future. The 16-year-old twice broke the Games 200m record, his best time of 20.37secs sealing his first gold, and the fastest man (or teenager) in Southeast Asia is said to have run a 100m career best of 10.19sec. "I have never seen someone from Asia move like that and at that age," said retired sprinter U.K. Shyam, Singapore's 100m national record-holder, according to The Straits Times. "Just think: his time means he's faster than Usain Bolt was when Bolt was 16."

Golden timing

A sport not usually associated with romance, a married Vietnamese chess couple each won gold in

Dixon seizes 5th Indy 500 pole

WASHINGTON: New Zealand's Scott Dixon earned his fifth Indianapolis 500 pole position in sensational style on Sunday, clocking the second-fastest four-lap qualifying run ever at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Dixon topped the final Fast Six section of qualifying with a four-lap run that averaged 234.046 (376.66 Km/h) - featuring two laps of the 2.5-mile oval at more than 234 mph.

Dixon put his Honda-powered Chip Ganassi team car on pole for the second straight year, but with just one victory, in 2008, to show for his prior four pole positions the Kiwi veteran was already looking ahead to next Sunday's 106th running of the fabled race. "Obviously, it doesn't mean a thing next Sunday," he said. "So we're starting in the right spot. We haven't had a good record keeping it in the right spot but we'll definitely be trying come next Sunday."

Despite that pragmatic stance, Dixon was clearly exhilarated by the day's activities, which featured the fastest 12 finishers in Saturday's opening qualifying competing in Top 12 qualifying and the top six from that coming back to set pole position and the first two rows of the grid. With the final Fast Six run, Dixon pushed Ganassi teammate Alex Palou of Spain (233.499 mph) into second on the grid. Ed Carpenter Racing's Dutch driver Rinus VeeKay claimed the third spot on the first row with a run at 233.385 mph.

Team chief and sometime driver Ed Carpenter (233.080 mph) claimed the fourth spot ahead of Swedish Ganassi driver Marcus Ericsson (232.764),



HANOI: Participants take part in the closing ceremony of the 31st Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games) in Hanoi on May 23, 2022. —AFP

their categories at almost the same time. Playing for the men's and women's rapid titles, Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son and his wife Pham Le Thao Nguyen claimed gold in their chess matches just minutes apart. "We were always together in training. We supported and shared difficulties together," Truong Son, 32, the youngest Vietnamese to be named a grandmaster, said. "Now is the time for us to celebrate together."

Stadium proposals

There was something in the air too at Hanoi's My Dinh stadium. Days after a spectator got down on one knee to ask his partner's hand in marriage at the opening ceremony—she said yes—Vietnamese long

jumper Nguyen Tien Trong did likewise with partner Nguyen Thi Phuong Trinh. The sepak takraw competitor also said yes to cap quite a day for Trong—earlier he won gold for the hosts.

Football frenzy

Thousands of Vietnamese poured into the streets across the country after the Games hosts beat Thailand 1-0 for men's football gold. Forward Nham Manh Dung was the hero with an 83rd-minute header that arrowed into the top corner and sent the capacity 40,000 crowd into a frenzy. Afterwards, fans waving Vietnamese flags and blasting air horns clogged the roads of Hanoi and beyond in an outpouring of national pride. —AFP

Hamilton reflects on what might have been in stunning drive

BARCELONA: Lewis Hamilton was left reflecting on 'what might have been' on Sunday after producing a vintage 'world champion' show at the Spanish Grand Prix. Hamilton recovered from running last following a first-lap collision to finish fifth after a stunning race for Mercedes at the Circuit de Catalunya where he has won a record six times. The seven-time world champion was in 20th position and 35 seconds adrift after pitting with a puncture on the opening lap, but then surged through the field as the fastest car in the race won by world champion Max Verstappen in a Red Bull one-two.

He would have finished fourth behind impressive team-mate George Russell if not for a cooling problem that allowed Carlos Sainz to pass him for Ferrari on the closing laps. "If I hadn't had that issue at the beginning, who knows where we would have been in the end?" he said. "It's a horrible feeling being that far behind, but you have to keep your head up, keep pushing and hope for better." After the clash with Kevin Magnussen's Haas, Hamilton volunteered to retire and save his engine, feeling that a points finish was not possible.

But Mercedes told him to stay out because they believed eighth was possible - and his surging drive earned him 'driver of the day' from the fans vote on the official Formula One website. "They said I could maybe get to eighth and that doesn't feel like an impressive result, but at least I'd get into the points, but then to be fighting for fourth, I was so happy. The car felt great in the race. Our pace was closer to the top guys in the race, which is amazing. —AFP

Experience counts

Johnson enlivened Sunday's qualifiers with a big wobble on his Top-12 run that ended his hopes of making the Fast Six. "These guys are so good at what they do," said Johnson, who moved into IndyCar racing last year but didn't opt to tackle the oval tracks until this season. "I just need more experience." —AFP

Sports

Guardiola hails 'legends' as Man City prepare to party

City seal their 4th title in 5 seasons in breathless fashion

LONDON: Pep Guardiola described his Manchester City players as "legends" after they staged an incredible fightback to win the Premier League, with fans preparing to line the streets on Monday to hail their heroes. City sealed their fourth title in five seasons in breathless fashion on Sunday, scoring three goals in five minutes to overturn a 2-0 deficit late in the second half against Aston Villa and break the hearts of Liverpool fans.

The dramatic scenes at a rocking Etihad Stadium came 10 years after Sergio Aguerro sealed the title in a similarly nerve-shredding 3-2 final-day win. Liverpool ended up 3-1 victors against Wolves but the result at Anfield ultimately proved immaterial after substitute Ilkay Gundogan scored either side of Rodri's strike to complete an astonishing turnaround.

City finished on 93 points, one ahead of Jurgen Klopp's men as they ended their rivals' hopes of winning an unprecedented quadruple and lifted a ninth major

trophy of Guardiola's reign. City, who for so long lived in the shadow of neighbours Manchester United, are now establishing their own dynasty to match the achievements of previous great United and Liverpool teams.

"In the last five years winning four Premier Leagues, these guys are legends already," an ecstatic Guardiola said after the match on Sunday. "I'm sorry, people have to admit it. This group of players are absolutely eternal in this club because what we achieve is so difficult to do. Just Sir Alex Ferguson with United has done it years ago two or three times, now I realised again the magnitude of Sir Alex Ferguson and his United."

Liverpool chase

Guardiola also paid tribute to Liverpool, who were 14 points behind City in January, and seemingly out of the title picture before relentlessly hunting City down. "I've never seen a team like Liverpool in my life," he

said. "I know it's tough, but they helped us become a better team season by season." Thousands of City fans decked out in sky blue will line the streets of Manchester for an open-top bus parade on Monday evening, starting at about 1700 GMT.

But for a while on Sunday it appeared City had blown their chance and the Premier League trophy would be heading to Anfield for the second time in three seasons. Mohamed Salah and Andy Robertson struck late on as Liverpool got the win they needed, but by then the turnaround at the Etihad was complete and the Reds' quadruple hopes were over. The 19-time champions had to settle for second place despite amassing 92 points—three years after they also lost out agonizingly to City by a single point.

Klopp, whose side have already won the League Cup and FA Cup this season, now faces the task of lifting his men ahead of next week's Champions League

final against Real Madrid. "I am proud but I'm disappointed of course as well," he said. "There are maybe worse scenarios. If you would have been a point up and don't make it, that might feel even worse. But apart from that, it's not cool. But it's not completely unexpected obviously, it was clear before the game that a lot of things had to happen."

Klopp was bullish as he looked forward to the game against Madrid in Paris, where Liverpool are aiming to be crowned European champions for the seventh time. "This season is absolutely incredible and will not end today, it ends next week obviously," he said. "And there we will try absolutely everything." "We have now five days to prepare the final, that's what we will do. "We face an incredibly experienced team but that's OK, that's really OK. And of course, losing the league today increased the desire to put it right next week, it increased the desire." — AFP



Zain main sponsor of padel competitions at GCC Games

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its main sponsorship of the third GCC Games' padel competitions. The company's support comes as part of its wider official sponsorship of the GCC Games hosted by the State of Kuwait between 16-31 May and organized by the Kuwait Olympic Committee under the patronage of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Zain visited the men's and women's padel national teams during their training camp at the Kuwait Sports Club's courts at Kaifan. The teams are preparing to take part in the upcoming playoffs after the Kuwait Olympic Committee officially announced padel among the sports listed for the GCC Games. Padel is a racket sport that witnessed great popularity recently in Kuwait and around the world and features a unique playstyle that consists of a mix of tennis and squash.

The sport is usually played in doubles in a closed court with walls the balls can be played off. The men's playoffs will be held at Yarmouk Sports Club's courts in Mishref, while the women's playoffs are set to be played at Kuwait Sports Club's courts in Kaifan. Zain's support to the padel competitions comes as part of its wider official sponsorship of the third GCC Games in collaboration with the Kuwait Olympic Committee.

The company is keen on supporting the various sports programs and official competitions hosted in Kuwait with the aim of elevating the Kuwaiti sports scene. Zain strongly believes in the role played by the sports sector in progressing national economy and developing the local touristic scene. The third GCC Games features wide participation from GCC national teams in 16 different sports, including fencing, esports, table tennis, swimming, karate, judo, athletics, tennis, shooting, cycling, ice hockey, futsal, basketball, volleyball, handball, and padel - which Zain sponsors.

The games feature the participation of over 1,800 players from across the GCC and are held across 12 sporting venues in Kuwait. The competition also features 300 gold medals, 300 silver medals, and 300 bronze medals to winners. The third GCC games have selected the fox Salmi as the event's official mascot, inspired by the Fennek fox (Al Hesi), one of the icons of Kuwaiti wildlife, known for its ability to live in Kuwait's harsh desert environment and extreme heat.

The company's support to this event springs from its corporate sustainability strategy towards supporting Kuwaiti sports. Zain is a strong believer in the talents and capabilities of the nation's young athletes and continues to support a great number of local athletes who represent Kuwait in local, regional, and international arenas.

As a leading private sector company in Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support excellence across the sports sector. The company will continue to put Kuwaiti sports and athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition and support they deserve.

Kuwait biking team wins bronze medal

By Abdellatif Sharaa and Agencies

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti women's biking team won a bronze medal in the female group riders competition, held on Monday, as part of the Third GCC Sports Games, hosted by Kuwait. The UAE team of cyclists clinched the gold medal and the Saudis bagged the silver. In the individual women bikers' competition, the UAE biker, Sheikha Rashed, won the gold medal, her fellow citizens Safia Al-Sayegh, the silver, and Hoda Hussein, the bronze medal. The two races were held on Kuwait's landmark Sheikh Jaber Bridge, early on Monday.



Meanwhile, President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah said Kuwait gave sports a priority out of its belief in social and sports responsibility and in confirmation of its future strategy to work on the development of the Olympic movement under the guidance of HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince. As the third Gulf Sports Games enter its eighth day, Kuwait continues to dominate the medals tally as follows:

Medals Table				
Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Kuwait	22	19	19	60
Bahrain	17	17	12	46
Qatar	12	15	12	39
Oman	11	5	10	26
UAE	9	10	8	27
KSA	8	10	18	36



Zain officials with Kuwait men's padel team.



Zain officials with Kuwait women's padel team.

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401

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DALLAS: Stephen Curry #30 of the Golden State Warriors shoots the ball during Game 3 of the 2022 NBA Playoffs Western Conference Finals against the Dallas Mavericks on May 22, 2022. —AFP

Curry, Wiggins sink Mavericks

Warriors move to the brink of the NBA Finals

DALLAS: Stephen Curry and Andrew Wiggins starred as the Golden State Warriors moved to the brink of the NBA Finals on Sunday with a 109-100 victory over the Dallas Mavericks. The clinical Warriors performance on the road in Dallas gives Steve Kerr's team a commanding 3-0 lead in the best-of-seven Western Conference finals series. No team in the 75-year history of the NBA has ever successfully overturned a 3-0 series deficit in the playoffs.

Curry led the scoring for the Warriors with 31 points, 11 assists and five rebounds while Wiggins was exceptional with 27 points and 11 rebounds. Klay Thompson also came up big with 19 points while Draymond Green and Jordan Poole added 10 points apiece. Luka Doncic once again delivered a monumental display for Dallas with 40 points, but the Slovenian star will need to conjure something even more miraculous to prevent the Warriors from advancing to an NBA finals showdown against either Boston or Miami.

"That was just a great team win," Curry said afterwards. "When you're up 2-0 and you win on the road, it gives you a stranglehold and control of the series. That's huge. "We obviously know that the job's not done, but it's

a good feeling to know that we can play with house money on Tuesday (in game four) and try and get the job done." Warriors coach Kerr paid tribute to Curry's performance. "Steph was brilliant tonight. His conditioning level is amazing," Kerr said. "He's out there flying around defensively and then playing at such a high level on the offensive end. It's remarkable to watch him play."

Doncic defiant

Doncic meanwhile refused to concede that a Warriors series victory will now be a formality. "It's not over yet, but it's not going to be easy," Doncic said. "The Warriors are not going to give you anything easy. "Nobody had us being here in these Conference Finals. But I think the Warriors are playing incredible. Everybody knows their role. "Everybody just stays together. They've been together for a long time, and I think they're playing good basketball, so that's what I think is going to be really difficult."

"These past three games it's been very difficult." After taking a 48-47 half-time lead, the Warriors took a decisive grip on the game in the third quarter. Curry drained 11 points as the Warriors outscored Dallas 30-21 in the third

quarter to lead by 10 heading into the fourth at 78-68.

That margin proved to be enough as the Warriors maintained their composure during the fourth quarter to keep the Mavs at arm's length. Wiggins produced a high-light-reel worthy moment mid-way through the final quarter with a monstrous one-handed dunk over Doncic. The bucket was initially ruled out for an offensive foul but Warriors coach Kerr successfully challenged the call to leave the Warriors 10 points clear at 93-83. "It was an amazing dunk," Kerr said afterwards. "I was surprised at the call but glad we had the challenge left."

Soon afterwards Wiggins punished a rash challenge from Doncic to claim three free throws and leave Golden State 102-89 ahead with just over four minutes remaining. There was a nervous moment for Golden State when Spencer Dinwiddie nailed a three-pointer with just over a minute remaining to make it a five-point game at 104-99. But the Warriors' response was ruthless, Poole making a soul-destroying three-pointer to restore Golden State's eight-point advantage and effectively ice the game with 54 seconds left on the clock. Game four in the series takes place in Dallas on Tuesday. —AFP



MILAN: Inter Milan's Italian head coach Simone Inzaghi attends the Italian Serie A football match between Inter and Sampdoria on May 22, 2022. —AFP

Inzaghi conquers Inter Milan despite title disappointment

MILAN: Simone Inzaghi will count his first season at Inter Milan as a success even though he conceded the Serie A title to local rivals AC Milan, as his team's chances of retaining their crown were in doubt last summer. The 46-year-old will point to the Italian Cup and Super Cup, both won against arch rivals Juventus in dramatic style, and qualification for the knockout stages of the Champions League which had eluded his predecessor Antonio Conte in his two years in charge at the San Siro.

Former Lazio forward Inzaghi has repeatedly said that the Inter hierarchy asked him for a top four spot and to reach the Champions League knockouts after taking over from Conte. And last week he even told reporters that he would "rather drop points at home and advance in the Champions League".

Inter lost the Scudetto during a two-month slump over February and March which coincided with their narrow defeat to Liverpool. They had been four points clear of Milan and Napoli having played a game less at the start of February, but defeat in the Milan derby started a run of just one win in seven league matches-over then rock-bottom Salernitana-which lasted until a fortuitous triumph at Juve in early April.

From there Inzaghi's team picked up form again but the only match they didn't win of their final eight was a crushing 2-1 defeat in their game in hand at Bologna which denied them top spot and handed Milan an advantage they never let slip. Losing the league to Milan will be painful for Inter fans but their team's title credentials were in serious question before the start of the campaign.

Inzaghi arrived at Inter with the club about to go into full-blown crisis mode and folded in cheap replacements for departing stars, creating a new style of play which got the best out of the whole team rather than just a few key players. A dramatic summer for the champions reached its lowest ebb when star striker Romelu Lukaku was sold to Chelsea, a transfer that enraged not just supporters but reportedly also CEO Giuseppe Marotta and Inzaghi. —AFP

Osaka out at French Open as Swiatek extends winning run

PARIS: Former world number one Naomi Osaka lost in the first round of the French Open on Monday, 12 months after controversially quitting the tournament, while women's title favourite Iga Swiatek stretched her winning streak to 29 matches. Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam champion, was knocked out 7-5, 6-4 by American 27th seed Amanda Anisimova-the same player who ended the Japanese star's title defence at the Australian Open this year.

An error-plagued Osaka served up eight double faults and committed 29 unforced errors on her return to Roland Garros, after withdrawing in 2021 when she refused to honor mandatory media commitments before revealing she had been suffering from depression. "It's tough to see Naomi Osaka in the first round so I knew it wouldn't be easy," said Anisimova, who reached the semi-finals in Paris three years ago. "I knew I had to play my best tennis and the conditions were not easy."

As rain fell on the outside courts, Swiatek required just 54 minutes to dispatch Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko 6-2, 6-0 under the roof on Court Philippe Chatrier. The 20-year-old Swiatek, who took over as world number one following Ashleigh Barty's shock retirement, has won her last five tournaments and is bidding for a second French Open in three attempts. "Today was a pretty good match," said Swiatek. "I love playing here even though the last couple of days it's been raining and pretty dark."

The 2020 champion will play Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska or American Alison Riske for a spot in the last 32. Swiatek is unbeaten since February and has the longest winning streak on the WTA tour since Serena Williams won 34 matches in a row in 2013. "I'm pretty sure that it can end, but I just want to keep going. I'm sure someday my streak will stop. "I'm just focusing on tennis and playing my game, not on stats or some numbers."

Djokovic, Nadal ready to roll

Defending champion Novak Djokovic and 13-time



PARIS: Ukraine's Lesya Tsurenko serves the ball to Poland's Iga Swiatek during their women's singles match on day two of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament in Paris on May 23, 2022. —AFP

French Open winner Rafael Nadal start their Roland Garros campaigns later on a star-studded Monday. Djokovic plays Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan in the first of 10 night sessions-introduced at Roland Garros last year when a pandemic curfew saw most late matches played in front of empty stands.

It is the world number one's first Grand Slam match since his high-profile deportation from Australia. He won his first title of the year at the Italian Open earlier this month. "I feel I am always in that contention to fight for any Grand Slam trophy," said Djokovic, who is seeded to meet Nadal in the quarter-finals and Spanish teenage sensation Carlos Alcaraz in the last four. Djokovic's last match at a major was his loss to Daniil Medvedev in last year's US Open final, a defeat which denied the Serb a calendar Grand Slam.

Nadal has yet to win a title on his beloved clay this season, but played down concerns over the chronic foot issue that resurfaced in Rome. "There is nothing

to recover," said Nadal, who faces Australia's Jordan Thompson. "What happened in Rome is something that happened very often in my practices." "I was suffering after that for a couple of days, but I feel better. That's why I'm here." Nadal began the year with a 20-match winning run, capturing a second Australian Open title to claim a record 21st Grand Slam and move ahead of Djokovic and Roger Federer.

The 35-year-old's record at the French Open stands at a staggering 105 wins and just three losses since his 2005 title-winning debut. Djokovic has been responsible for two of those defeats. One came in the bruising semi-final 12 months ago, the most recent clash of the pair's epic 58-match rivalry. Reigning women's champion Barbora Krejčíková will play France's Diane Parry in round one. The Czech world number two has been sidelined by an arm injury since late February and is yet to play on clay this year. —AFP